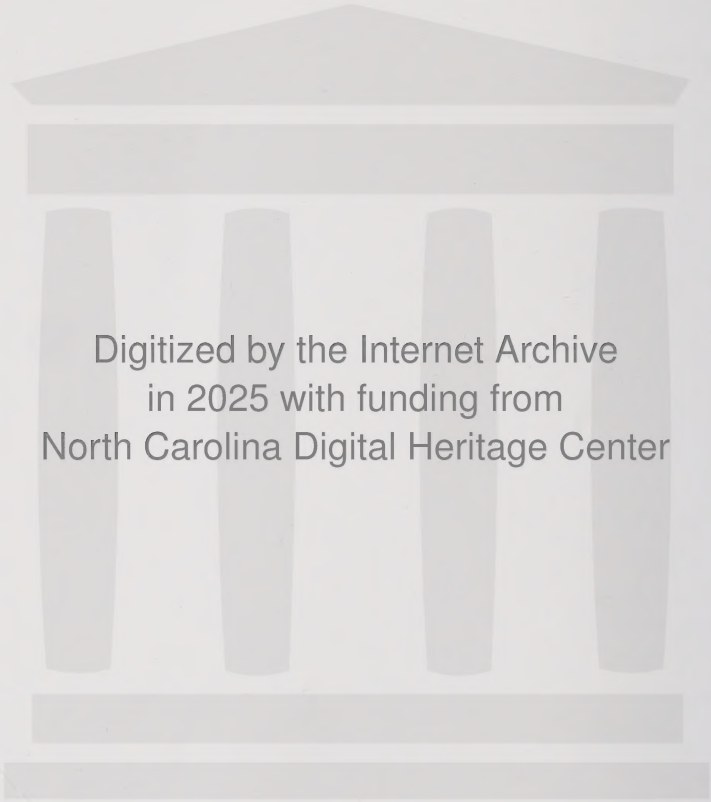
The Rhapsodist 2025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The Rhapsodist

Spring 2025

Asheville-Buncombe Technical Community College
Asheville, NC

Editors

Barbie Byrd
Erik Moellering
Rafaella Mowad
Eric Overbey

Readers

Jennifer Browning
Robyn Luney
Eleanor Macken
Chelsea Patterson
Maggie Poist
Lisa York

Design/Layout

The Rhapsodist Editors
with assistance from
Porscha Orndorf & Dave Kareken

rhapsodist, n.

Pronunciation: Brit. /'rapsĕd ist/ , U.S. /'ræpsĕdist/
Etymology: < rhapsody n. + -ist suffix.
Compare French rhapsodiste ...

1. A collector of miscellaneous literary pieces. Now hist. and rare.

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A-B Tech's Student Services Department

Editors' Note:

"Move through transformation, out and in.
What is the deepest loss that you have suffered?
If drinking is bitter, change yourself to wine.

In this immeasurable darkness, be the power
that rounds your sense in their magic ring,
the sense of their mysterious encounter."

—Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus*, II, 29

Dear Reader,

As A-B Tech's primary venue for literature and fine art, *The Rhapsodist* showcases the best examples of creative expression from our college's diverse population. We hope you enjoy this year's issue of writing and art — a catalyst for transformation in the face of adversity and disaster. Thank you for your continued support of *The Rhapsodist*.

Rilke, Rainer Maria and Stephen Mitchell. *The Sonnets to Orpheus*. Simon and Schuster, 1985.

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After the Flood

Ronnie Z. Nielsen

Two Flood Haiku

Erin Marie Nelson Wheeler

Yellow leaves blow
Water rages in lofty mountains
Forlorn faces stare

Autumn rain and wind
Stretch beyond deep borders
Wood and life adrift

Disarray

Diana Laura Guzman

Swails

Crain Cutler

When she finished weeping
We began to wail
Her arms around us
Holding us still
While the world that surrounds us
Became so frail
Twigs for trees
Creeks for seas
Shallow gasps
Into flooded lungs
She bathed herself in our tears
Crashing like rapids
When the rivers receded
We found our families
In ditches and swails
We found our homes
Reduced to splintered lumber and nails
"Repayment" she said
We created this slow death
Now her winds have taken what was left of our breath

I Survived Hurricane Helene and All I Got Was $172.12 from FEMA and Heartache

Clay Jones

The day before the storm, I stepped onto the grass and water rose up from the compressed earth, nearly up to my ankles. My neighbor drove off to work, his boss uncommunicative, uncooperating, or something. Would it ever matter? After we woke up that morning to ruins—ruined streets, ruined lines, ruined forests, ruined mountains—he didn't come back. Communications were severed, water stopped. Too many nights spent sitting in the dark.

Shredded plastic hangs high in the trees all winter, where all that water was. The river freezes. Too many things might never come back.

for appalachia.

Olivia Gamache

And the trees collapsed in one fell swoop,
buckled down like
    a ghastlydisplayofdominoes.
Swiped to the ground as if from an angry hand,
swatting mercilessly from the sky.

You know this town will never look the same,
the earth split down the middle
    a finger drawn through sand.
That the river cannot atone
and the soil does not forget.

That the mountains have carved a place
for that little boy,
its ridges carrying the grief
for those who cannot grant absolution.

And though the tree stumps now stand in longing,
you counted the rings
and found it older than you.

And though you still shake when you hear a branch fall,
spring will come,
    and with it a land once more green.

It's worth it to remember
your hand near a stranger's
was not for nothing.

The leaves will still tremble
even if only a breeze.

But spring will come,
and with it a land once more green.

Asheville Apocalypse

Mark Damon Puckett

I live in a 1915 house in the Montford area of Asheville, just a couple blocks from the graves of Thomas Wolfe and O. Henry in the currently closed Riverside Cemetery. About a month before Helene sucker-punched our city, a river of water washed through the neighborhood and aimed for the basement. From the kitchen window, I saw this riparian oddity flow around a corner and bolted downstairs to rescue some of my paintings stored there, luckily lifting them all to safety as two feet of water came up to my thighs.

As a precursor to the hurricane, this flooding had prepped me for the oncoming ten-plus inches of water that deluged us in two days. In fact, I was so focused on sumping the basement that the windstorm truly blindsided me. Around 3:00 a.m. on Friday, September 27, power was lost, stopping the sump pumps. I know this because there was another foot of flooding in the basement by morning. I awoke to no lights around 9:00 a.m. As I stood on my porch and looked at Watauga Street, I watched a pole split and crash right beside my car. Missed. Another tree fell on my neighbor's hood, also missing mine. I called my brother, and, as I left a message, a third tree fell across the road. Through some miracle my car remained untouched. Phone service soon stopped.

Callous rubberneckers stomped in the yard taking photos, and groups of tour bikes tore up the grass, not bothering to go around. They dropped candy litter and didn't bother to pick it up. Wires were down everywhere on the sidewalks. Multiple telephone poles fell. Water, nope. I heard a woman up the street took a board in the neck while she was in her shower. While the house here had no power for twelve days, the unrented, empty cottage in the back

did have it after three. I camped out there, as it had just been renovated. There was no internet for forty-two days and no water for sixty-two days.

Potable water trucks began dropping off trailers in places. I lost fifteen pounds carrying water through the streets and up the stairs, injuring my right shoulder. Due to the basement humidity, I was actually lucky and figured out a life hack by using the dehumidifier water for the four toilets. I heard about fistfights in the gas-lines. The line around Harris Teeter on Merrimon stretched for half a mile. When I finally went, the inside checkout queues wrapped all the way around the store.

For the first three nights, I had no power in the house, and dark nights came early. Both my neighbors on the right and left had power after the third day. I didn't. In the meantime they let me set up my coffee maker next door, and I can tell you that the first warm black cup never tasted so good after a few days. Then I checked the cottage (same property) and realized it had juice. I was afraid to drive anywhere in an effort to save a full tank of gas. Cleanup began as everyone rallied to cut up fallen trees (at least six on Watauga alone, a short street). No trees had hit the house since a number of them had been trimmed and/or cut down six months earlier. Others were not so fortunate.

September had not been an easy month already. My mother had died on September 10th after fracturing her hip and breaking her leg then having a heart attack. Her cremated remains were in Swannanoa, an area devastated by the river, closing the funeral home with no power. Her death certificate was lost in the mail holding up insurance to pay five-figure final costs. A week after her death, I had a tooth extraction (after three root canals) and a bone graft. Don't forget the two-foot flood in the basement. My younger brother is a contractor, and we began working on a house in Hendersonville damaged by numerous trees falling on the roof. I had to rip out all the wet flooring, and a hickory board flew up,

cracking my nose as three staples scraped the skin. It's still crooked and scarred.

Without water, I used wet wipes to clean my grimy feet that never looked or felt washed, black dirt always stuck in the toenails. I shampooed my hair about once a week in the sink. It was impossible to keep dishes and utensils sanitized. One time I tried to make pasta in the cottage, and it took about an hour afterward to scour the pot with toilet paper, wet wipes and cotton swabs. My ears filled with wax. My teeth developed a green moss that luckily cleared up with a recent cleaning (delayed because the dentist office had been closed). The oral surgeon, also shuttered, postponed my follow-up visit after the extraction.

Water came back after about a month, but in a house that is 109 years old, the radiators were an issue. After day sixty-two, we were able to turn on the water. As for the internet, the Spectrum guys were in a panic after massive damage to their company. Cinemark had closed, and their parking lot had turned into a Spectrum headquarters. After a few weeks, I went outside to talk to some of the workers, and they pointed to a line that had fallen, telling me I should call to get it fixed. Incorrect. Another week passed and I saw a guy working. I went out to talk to him. He was quite nice and took the time to come into the basement and locate the underground line. We then figured that it ran to that pole that had crashed to the ground. He ran a line and I had internet. After forty-two days. My neighbors still didn't.

Downtown was a dead zone, most businesses without water or power. I started to take pictures of the devastation in River Arts where the Grail Moviehouse and hundreds of businesses near the French Broad were obliterated. A river that is normally 1.5 feet deep somehow rose to 26.5, in effect a tsunami. The same thing happened with the Swannanoa River in Biltmore Village all the way down to Black Mountain, ripping towns to pieces. The Wendy's in Biltmore Village had water about a foot from its roof. I often would

walk through Montford and turn right at All Day Darling for walks along the greenways to the Grail for matinees. It took me about forty minutes each way. No longer.

With a busted nose and missing tooth (waiting for an implant), I walked around my city in a daze, still mourning my mother. On every street you could see piles of tree debris, cars smashed, houses damaged. I had been in Hurricane Hugo while I was at Davidson in September 1989 and will never forget the 150-year-old oak trees on campus felled by the storm. But Helene was an anomaly and another level of storm. We had those ten-plus inches of rain soaking the ground on the Wednesday and Thursday before the winds pummeled us on the Friday, causing the ground to be so soaked that the trees were like dominoes.

Flooding is sinister and harrowing, a kind of ruthless power. We're so used to thinking of water as cleansing that when it's enigmatic and destructive, the mind can't fathom it. On the day I walked around River Arts, I saw a car buried in the dirt. Most of the buildings were obliterated. Mountains of rubbish stood in front of desecrated art studios. A blue truck was ten feet in the air lodged inside an edifice.

Friends from my childhood in Virginia sent me gifts. I got to know my neighbors a little better. Many called to check on me. The NC Department of Health and Human Services put the death count in Western North Carolina at 103 as of December 4th. A mountain town like Asheville was never equipped for a hurricane that shocked everyone. As a result, there has been no plan in place for recovery. What other city in America has not had water for a month? Restaurants are closing left and right. Litter fills the sides of the roads. I-26, a perpetual boondoggle of a highway that has never been fixed, has hundreds of uncovered, speeding dump trucks dropping rocks as you drive. I've watched trailers overfilled with tree limbs spilling wood into the streets. One time, I was at a light in Hendersonville, and an eight-foot log fell in the middle of

the road under a stoplight. The guy in front of me jumped out of his car and dragged it off. Cleanup is all firefighting. It is dangerous out there.

With the house in Hendersonville, the insurance adjusters were taking their time with payments, delaying work, and temperatures dropped into the teens for a few days. I was pulling sheetrock one afternoon in the freezing rooms when I went down to the basement to check on the dehumidifiers, noticing a ceiling leak. I called my brother to tell him. We then figured out that it was coming from the upstairs bathroom. I looked in the toilet to see a block of ice while on the right side there was a circular crack where the trap was, causing the water to flow on the floor. Right after the storm, the owners were moving out possessions as we initiated the demolition. One lady had a dog that looked stressed. I was about six feet away from it when it lunged at me for no reason and bit my knee. Luckily, I wore thick work pants. The owner apologized and cried, and I realized that sensitive dogs were just as on edge as us humans.

The word "aftermath" has its origins in agriculture with "math" as crop mowing. Our aftermath means quotidian reminders of how Asheville was mowed down by two rivers. I recall taking a graduate poetry course at Middlebury when Natasha Trethewey, Pulitzer winning poet, visited one afternoon. We had been reading *Beyond Katrina: A Meditation on the Mississippi Gulf Coast*, and she talked about the hurricane when we had lunch with her. I never imagined I would be writing an essay like this one about Asheville. One afternoon a few days after Helene, I was next door at my neighbor's, and we were all listening to his truck radio for updates from the local government. One official said, "This is our Katrina."

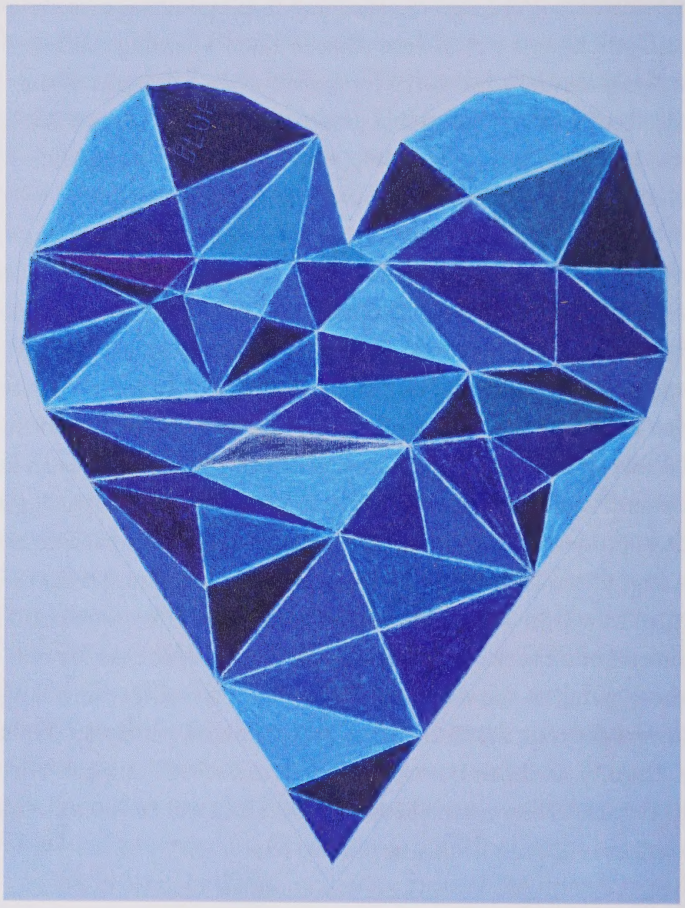
We've been battered. As I drive around the French Broad and Swannanoa every day, I see a diminished home. Much like a face with a cracked nose and missing tooth. Only, it's a thousand faces, a city smashed and turned to rubble. I was working

on a mini-trackhoe on another house as my brother dug ten-foot trenches all around the perimeter. My job was then to powerwash the walls and footers so the tar guy could repair them. This meant putting on galoshes and yellow slickers. I looked like the Morton Salt guy. One afternoon after it rained, my feet were stuck in two feet of wet, sloppy mud, and I couldn't move. Immobile. Mist from the powerwasher touched my face, and it felt good because, at that point, I still had no water. Free shower. I had a bandage on my nose. I was about to feel sorry for myself when I thought of the hundreds of workers doing this grueling work seven days a week. I know how hard it is on the body, especially since cleanup has moved into the cold and windy days approaching winter.

We took a hit. Every day we take more. The storm was quick, the aftermath long. To date we still haven't picked up Mom's ashes. A lawyer friend from Davidson finally helped us locate the death certificate to speed up dealing with the noxious insurance companies. I stayed at the house throughout the power and water issues. Many left. I'm one person who had four toilets in a house and a cottage. I can't imagine what it was like for families with kids and pets. I was determined to stay here and help. I've been digging ditches, picking up rocks, and dragging brush. I think back on those first days of darkness when I went to bed by 7:00 p.m. I tried to think of how this would end. It doesn't though. There's no period at the end of a hurricane. Just ellipses. Dot, dot, dot. As for me, I've been going to the movies at Regal and Cinemark and writing reviews. I see that the Grail is trying to find a new location. We'll be fine. The city has been hurt and surprised, but we'll dig out. We'll make it back to something beyond pain, and I can tell you that no one will ever kill our urban, mountain heart.

Big Blue Asheville Heart

Mark Damon Puckett



Miscommunications

Liv Lemire

A missed call from a friend
She leaves a voicemail
"Sorry I missed you! I'm assuming you're at work!"

We fish for the channel
With the battery-operated radio that has become
our lifeline
Something bites —
We gather 'round to hear the
county briefing:

"To learn more about the cellular outages,
Visit our website"

"To file a missing persons case,
Call this number"

"To see a map of the damage to the city water system, join
Our Facebook Live"

"Sorry, we are having
technical difficulties."

I don't go to work anymore.
Not since it washed away.
I have another job, sure
(I actually have three — who doesn't these days?)
But one is operating as an emergency shelter.

The other two washed away.

"Let me know if there is anything I can do for you
from afar!"

Can you keep talking about us?
Please don't forget
Our taps are still dry,
windows dark.
Some windows have red X's
others yellow.
Can you bring back the water?
Let me worry about my bitchy coworkers again?
I used to stress over if I've eaten a balanced
diet throughout the day.
Now I just hope I don't get sick.
Don't forget to drink water —
But what if more doesn't come?

When I come stay with you
I'll bring
My shower supplies.
I've started
to keep my toiletries in my car
In case I find a place
to shower.
I've never smelled like so many different body washes before.

I want to offer what I have
but I am not using my own resources.
All I have is my time.
And my hands.

we sit in the yard, or
at the patio, waiting for
Water
To boil.
Helicopter blades replace the podcasts
And songs I usually play
while making breakfast.
The president flies over our head.
Does he see my home?
The cafe I used to study at?
The road I took to work?
Can he check
on my friends
For me?

Folks outside looking in know
More of the extent of the
Damage
Then we do.

Rumors spread like the floods
They found bodies floating past the hospital No the bodies are from the hospital They say that over 100 unidentified bodies lay in Mission Hospital they rise up from the Mud they find thousands more everyday They are paving over the bodies They are seizing private property to mine the mines are damaged they flooded the plastics company flooded the mud is toxic it is melting the boots off of people's feet leaving them with chemical burns the air burns as the mud turns to dust it burns people need UTI medicine because the waters burn and the air burns and they say a hurricane is coming our way another one it's in the Gulf and it's with this fear that my friends leave and I am stuck

.
.
.
"...So how were things before the hurricane?"

I can't remember. Does it matter anymore?
I was so busy but I loved my work. I was supposed to call my friend last weekend. I was supposed to babysit and go get ice cream with another friend. All I wanted was more time to hike and bike and cook and watch movies and craft.

I feel so much guilt. I should do more. How can I sit here and replace the buttons on my sweater when folks
have lost
Everything?

I am no first responder.
But these folks grow tired.
Some people have not been able to move.
Others can't stop, lest they fall
Apart.
They were forced to leave their homes
And so they found others
And food
And water.

I have been grateful for a home.
I have everything I need to survive.
I may not be a first responder
But I can be a second
Or a third.

I will find my community

Where my strengths and skills
Are needed
For now,
I help organize the home I've occupied.
I can walk
I can help a friend clean their space
I can share and talk and hug.

Despite everything,
The stars are so bright
Northern Lights are hazy at the sky's edge
The sky is so blue it's purple
On the fringes
The leaves change color
And the sun burns away the
morning fog.
This is my favorite time of year
It feels different —
But it's there.
Forests and gardens will regrow.
Maybe they'll rebuild those roads
with sidewalks
or bike lanes
But they will come back.
How ironic
To have so much water
And now
Not enough.

Creeks that stood shin-high swallowed
Cars
And homes.
You can see

The digestive remnants
On the banks.

The water will flow again
The rivers will flow easy
And I
Will flow
a l o n g

No Water to Flush With

Heather J. Lewis

Tues, Oct. 8.
Tired. Have to retreat. In my studio cutting small things to complete collages. I feel like I'm in collapse. Can't bear the thought of any more talking. Any more worrying.

*From a series appreciating all kinds of small plants while peeing in the yard.

The Pocket of Content

Kaydon Ruth Ingle

I don't want the smile
that comes with everything going right
I want the pocket of content
that comes from
playing basketball with a flat ball
organizing your sister's pantry
baking a frozen pizza
finding exactly what you need at the thrift store
and then leaving it behind
on her couch

A Summer Unraveling, 1957

Jennifer C. Quayle

Spring 1957

The ticking of the clock in the hallway mocked Edie. Each tick a little hammer blow to the porcelain of her sanity. She hadn't left the apartment in days, the world outside a blur, distorted and ugly. A gnawing emptiness scraped the walls of her insides, deepening the void she was unable to fill, no matter how many cigarettes she smoked, or how many days she slept through.

The air in the apartment was thick with the acrid bite of cigarette smoke and the cloying sweetness of fruit left to rot in the kitchen. The robe she hadn't changed out of for days smelled of dirty hair and slept-in perfume. Edie lay on her side, curled into herself on the threadbare velvet sofa, a cigarette dangling loosely from her fingers. She watched as the smoke curled and the dust motes twirled in a slant of sunlight. Mesmerized by the motes as they fell, she couldn't help but see them as a metaphor for her own existence: aimless, adrift, utterly insignificant.

Unable to lay on the couch a moment longer, Edie slowly walked into the bedroom and changed into her swimsuit, grabbing a towel on her way out the door. She walked down the stairs of her second-floor apartment, down to the courtyard where the pool sat nestled in untended, overgrown greenery. She laid her towel over a lounge chair and sank into its weathered embrace.

Sunshine, a searing blade, blinding and relentless, beat down on Edie as she lay. Sweat trickled down her skin, but she lay motionless, not even bothering to adjust the straps of her swimsuit tight over her shoulders. The radio, a distant shout from some-

one's balcony, reported another Soviet victory in the Space Race. She knew fear was gripping the country; another American failure, hanging like a paper moon for the world to see. But this fear was something that Edie was unable to carry; it was too heavy and required far too much effort. Instead, she lay still staring at the shimmering surface of the pool, the reflection from the sun a dance of lights and shadows. The world around her, with its triumphs and tragedies, anxieties and daydreams, felt far away. The grain of a poor television broadcast, it snowed in her periphery, something to passively observe, not experience. Her oversized sunglasses slid down the sweaty slope of her nose, an annoyance she couldn't be bothered to fix. Bile-sharp nausea rose in her throat, a bitter cocktail of anger and smothering dread.

Edie tried to recall when her sense of unreality began and started unraveling, the moment when it had loosened the knot of her mind. It was a hollow separation; a ghost-like feeling, the sensation of her insides being scooped out, leaving only the bag of her body remaining. Days bled into one another, each indistinguishable from the last, a monotonous symphony of echoes resounding in the empty bubble of her head. Edie lay still, her heart an incessant metronome, each beat a reminder of the passage of time; her relentless, exhausting existence. The glittering surface of the pool, the languid palm trees swaying slightly; the world outside of her own felt like distant rumors, irrelevant to her own existence.

She couldn't remember when the world lost its color, when life's vibrancy was clouded by grey. Was it the day she walked out on her job, the screaming pitch of children's voices ringing in her ears after she left? No. No, it had happened long before that. It was earlier, and it was a slow descent into a quaking apathy, a dimming of the stage lights until her world was a perpetual twilight. Now each day was simply a repeat of the last: another failed attempt to escape the ever-deepening grave of silence within her. There were times when it scared her, the feeling of losing her footing and slipping into the

bleak fog in her head.

On hopeless days, she would attempt to look ahead to the future but saw nothing. Only empty calendar squares and the echoes of ticking clocks. She felt trapped, unable to escape her life, which had begun to seem pointless. Her mind became a crystal ball, revealing a future where she became nothing—she was nothing—and grew old, still sitting in the same chair by the pool.

Edie felt a fervent squeeze in her chest, and she put her fist against her mouth, fearful that she would start screaming and be unable to stop. In a swift movement, she dropped her hand from her mouth and pulled her knees to her chest, her arms wrapped around her shins. A choked sound escaped her clenched throat as she leaned forward, and with mouth wide, she sunk her teeth into the bone and thin skin covering her kneecap, a blind hope that it would stem the screams. Angry tears burned her cheeks, and the fury she was becoming so familiar with was a tight hand around her throat. With teeth clenched, she ripped the sunglasses from her face and threw them to the ground. Edie stood, the concrete that edged the pool burning her feet. Relishing the pain, she walked back to her apartment as if she were sleepwalking.

The air conditioning was cold, and goosebumps spread over her skin like a blanket of braille. She stood motionless in front of the sliding glass doors that lead to the balcony. She stared at the palm trees outside, stock still without a breeze to stir them; the smell of sunblock on her hot skin ringing her like an aura. When she left for the pool, she had forgotten to turn the radio off, left it to sing for no one as she lay in the sun. Vera Lynn plaintively sang *Auf Wiederseh'n Sweetheart*, and it floated through the still apartment. It was a song that made Edie sad; a song that made her think too much, dwelling on ugly things she wished she could forget.

The time has come to part...
With love that's true, I'll wait for you.
Auf wiederseh'n, sweetheart...

Edie couldn't stand to listen any longer, afraid that the brittle glass of her mind would shatter if she was forced to hear the song all the way through. She strode to where the radio sat atop a decorative side table and turned the dial so hard it fell backwards and tumbled to the floor.

The clock in the living room chimed weakly, a small sound that grated on her nerves. She could smell the mustiness of the carpet where the sun shone on it, and she walked through the living room and down the hallway to the bedroom. The clock on her bedside table ticked, insistent; each tick a second gone from her life. She covered her face with her hands, a ragged exhale fraying in her throat. Edie fought the urge to dig her fingernails into the soft skin of her face, her neck—something to turn her attention away from the ticking clocks. The nausea rose with the familiar dread of knowing that the sun would come up tomorrow and she would have to face another day. She longed to transcend the iron inertia to find a sense of self—or at least a way to end the hollowness she was unable to leave behind.

She remembered an afternoon at the laundromat the week before, a young brunette sitting next to Edie flipping through the want ads. She noticed Edie eyeing the job listings.

The girl watched Edie a second before speaking through smacks on her chewing gum.

"Hiya, you looking for a job? Y'know, you're a good-looking gal. Have you ever thought about one of these modeling jobs?"

With a long red fingernail, she pointed at a column full of listings for open calls.

Edie, surprised, looked at her with wide eyes.

"No, I haven't."

The girl encouraged Edie to write down the names and addresses that were listed as she explained, "I've been making a little dough doing some modeling here and there." She was quiet for a moment while she watched Edie write. "But, before you go to any

of these calls," her voice carried a hint of warning. "Make sure you call Blue Ribbon first. They're an agency, keep you from getting scammed."

Still writing, Edie nodded and asked the girl about what types of modeling these ads were referring to. The girl smacked her gum before replying, "Well, it depends on your look. Advertisements, clothing, that kind of thing. If you have the real good looks and a swell figure, you can get lucky and do the cheesecake stuff."

"Cheesecake?"

"Pin-up stuff. Hardest to get but pays the best. Then there are the car shows, boat shows—pretty decent dough in those, too."

Edie finished writing and thanked the girl, her imagination a tornado of activity.

For weeks, Edie kept the list in her bedside table, too self-conscious to pursue them. But after a month of fruitless job searches, she steeled herself and made an appointment with the agency.

The Blue Ribbon Agency office was small, with headshots of beautiful girls lining the walls. A matronly woman, Harriett Grady, sat behind a large desk.

"Edie... Glass?" Ms. Grady glanced down at the form in front of her. "You're here to see about becoming one of our Blue Ribbon girls, is that right?"

"Y-Yes," Edie replied, vulnerable under Ms. Grady's calculating gaze.

Ms. Grady scanned the form before crossing her hands on the desk, "I'll be honest, your lack of experience counts against you. But we all must start somewhere, and your looks and figure are a boon. We'll put you through our modelling classes and get you trained. You'll be on a three-month probation. If you're booking jobs and clients are pleased, we'll officially sign you. Would that be agreeable to you?"

Smiling, Edie nodded.

As she walked to the bus stop, she felt a ripple in her mind, each pebble of fear disturbing the surface.

The bus was half-empty, and Edie took a seat against a window. She let her shoulders slump as she reached for the seat in front of her and released a heavy exhale. Hands gripping the sticky vinyl seatback, she leaned forward and rested her head on her forearm. The bus smelled of sweat and exhaust, the seat under her hands holding on to decades of dead skin. She stayed still for several minutes, breathing in the strange smells of bodies in a small space before leaning back in her seat. She took her compact from her handbag and opened it, checking her face in the silver-edged mirror, embarrassed and somewhat depressed to find herself looking so wan. One at a time, she took her ring fingers and swiped beneath her eyes, wiping away mascara and eyeliner that had smudged in the heat. Her reflection stared back at her with an expression of accusation, as if the mirror version of herself were displeased.

Edie stared back with hollow eyes as she felt the mask she wore slip from her face, her eyebrows heavy over her eyes, mouth downturned, her face like melted wax. Like a struck match, her thoughts caught fire, and she felt a hatred towards herself so powerful, she once again had to fight the urge to dig her fingernails into her skin. A whispering voice, in dulcet tones and twinkling intonations, was planting the seeds of self-loathing, enthusiastically making its voice heard over the din of self-abuse in her head, encouraging it. It cajoled her convincingly, reasoning that there was little point in living if this is what she was becoming: a candlewax face sleepwalking through a meaningless life. With a singsong chirp, the voice explained how easy it would be to step off a curb, or accidentally lean too far over a balcony railing. The gears in her brain jammed, and she sat in a stalled idle, dwelling. She considered how truly easy it would be to slip from this world, like falling through a trapdoor. The ultimate magic trick: here one minute, gone the next.

At home, her body dropped heavily onto the pink velvet stool set before her beloved vanity, and Edie let her handbag drop limply from her wrist onto the tabletop. The cheap imitation cut glass sconces that hung on the wall haloed her, its candlelit incandescence making everything soft-focused. Her head felt too heavy on her neck, bobbing ponderously. She turned her head languidly, fixating on the bulb of the light fixture, letting it sear her eyes until two bright suns eclipsed her vision, the afterimage lingering for minutes afterward. The memory of first moving to California, a bus ride across the country with a single suitcase and money saved up from cleaning and babysitting jobs. She found her apartment on the first day, and excitedly hunted the shops for furnishings to make the empty space seem less cavernous. The memory of that day calcified in her brain, turned into a scene she watched from the cheap seats; observing her life as if it were a play. Still looking at the bulb, her unblinking eyes widened and slowly began to cross, and her mind seemed to roll over.

Dragging her eyes away from the sconce, she sat slumped on the stool, her gaze unseeing, eyes glazed and vacant as she thought about the vanity and how she came to be sitting before the altar of its extravagance. Edie didn't register her reflection in the mirror until her dry eyes forced a blink, and she had no choice but to confront her own image. She felt her heart double beat, and her hand flew to her mouth as she beheld the image of someone she didn't recognize. Her mirror image felt like someone else, someone standing on the other side with her intense focus trained on Edie. Edie's eyelids felt unreasonably heavy, her face slack. Her head felt leaden, and she gripped the edge of the vanity, unsteady, worried she would fall from the stool. Leaning forward and pulling her upper body over the tabletop, Edie moved closer to the mirror and touched it, a reassurance that it was still made of glass, that it wasn't an open window. Her eyes glazed again, and she let herself get lost in the

looking glass, in the background behind the stranger that looked back at her. She rested her body against the cool wood, and she felt a cable-like tension that pulled her beneath the surface of something she felt powerless to.

Out of the corner of her eye, she swore she saw the stranger's mouth move. A momentary blur, a swipe of smeared ink. Her mind spiraled and she felt a tingling throughout her body. Edie felt uneasy, a disbelief that she was her, that she was alive. Her chest tightened and her breathing became short and shallow. She wanted the distressing feeling of being alive in her body to stop. Breathing through her mouth, Edie tried to smother her panic, the trapped feeling she felt. It felt wrong—that she was here, that she was living, breathing, existing—it all felt wrong. Edie's chest tightened and her breath was audible: rapid, choking sounds, raw edged between breathless panting. She didn't want to be her; she didn't want to be alive. Yet, as soon as the thought came, it went, and existence felt normal again. She couldn't understand how such immense fear could dissipate so quickly.

Edie put a hand to her chest and felt it rise and fall. Pulling her heavy eyes from the background of the mirror, she looked at her reflection again. Edie sat motionless, waiting for the stranger in the mirror to speak again. She kept blinking to keep her eyes from glossing over, pinching her wrist if she felt a stare overtaking her. Eventually, the reflection did attempt to speak again, mouth a blur like smeared lipstick, voice inaudible. Edie pulled her body even closer, her entire torso now resting on the vanity table, her face inches from the mirror's surface.

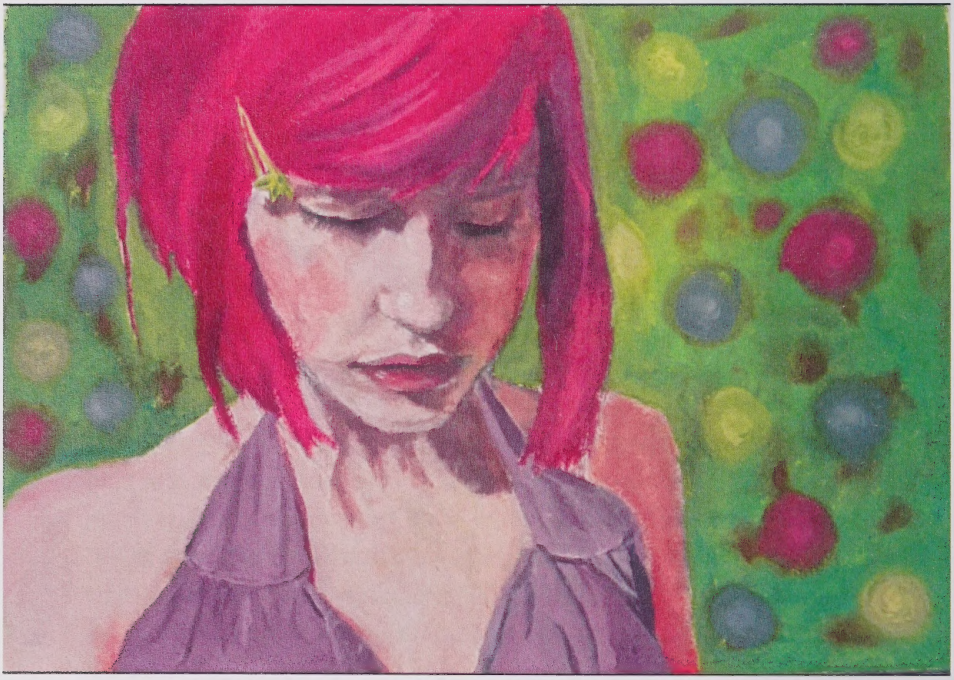
"What?" *What* did you say?" Edie asked hurriedly, and the reflection's mouth moved again. "I *can't* understand what you're *saying*," she said in a breathless desperation.

Edie moved forward even more, pressing the side of her face against the mirror in a better attempt to hear. But there was only a soft humming, a vibration, a familiar sound like a swarm of bees,

emanating from her reflection's mouth. She let her body slide from the table and sat back on the stool, looking squarely in the mirror. But when she did, the stranger was gone, and she was alone again. Silence, save for the ticking of a clock in another room.

In Fields of Flowers, I Think of You Always

Taylor Elizabeth Wells



A Collection of Haiku

Joe McCarty

Dry
Rocks in the desert
Long to see the riverbank
But rain will come soon

Evolution
Funny little beast
Totally tadpolular
What will he become?

Haiku
Haiku readies us
For battle, for peace, for love
Are you ready now?

Where the Sky Can Almost Reach

Nilah Wharton

dead bird on the sidewalk, eye of glass, body frozen rock,
there is nothing more I can do for you than

see you, feet curled twig-thin, and imagine you

alive

soaring on a winter updraft

dead bird on the sidewalk, feathers still carefully laid,
who lived and drank cool water and
brushed the edges of the heavens, you are

small, and I am not so small, but
the sky has seen both of us as fingertips on the
hands of itself and for

one

short

second

I know you.

dead bird on the sidewalk, I will walk away
back to my neon life, and the
ants will find their way to your heart

dead bird on the sidewalk,

that does not mean I have forgotten

Girl Holding Parasol Overlooking Lake Powell

Michelle Nicole Letts

Brown

Joe McCarty

He claimed brown as his favorite color
But, I always believed it to be green

The smooth mahogany in his cadence
Dances around the apartment
Careful not to step on the cat's nap

The tan in his coffee tastes of a first cigar
Sweet as the bark of sassafras
Bitter as a cynic smitten

He's a brunette, what can I say
The hazel that lingers ever in his eyes
Sounds like our first laugh on the floor of a dorm
We heard the beige joint sing to us

Love may not be red
Love may be this bronzed life

Abstract Fantasy

Harper Bolick

Sentimental Voyage

Kennon Webber

Any voyage takes you to another place;
this one takes you to another time.

The huge crowd waiting to board the ship annoyed Sheila. The cruise ship's superstructure towered over the crowd of passengers blocking the weak afternoon sunshine. She and her husband moved slowly towards the gangway. People about them mumbled and shuffled. She felt a chill, and the wet, cold wind off San Francisco Bay added to her discomfort.

"It's times like this that I'm sorry I listened to you," Sheila said, shuddering from the chill.

He put his arm around her.

"Honey, once we're aboard and the music begins, you'll love it!"

"If you say so," she said but without his enthusiasm.

As if on cue, big band music blasted from the ship's sound system. Drake recognized the Duke Ellington classic, "Tuxedo Junction." The couples around Sheila and Drake cheered and the mood of the crowd became more friendly and approachable.

"See," Drake said and kissed her.

Sheila rolled her eyes and said, "I could use a drink."

He pulled her closer and whispered, "Your cabin or mine?"

"Oh! You!"

Sheila punched him in his firm tummy, as the big band music segued from the Duke to a famous Glenn Miller arrangement. The mood of the on-coming boarders brightened when the musicians shouted-out, "Pennsylvania six five oh-oh-oh." The hoarse voices of the elderly passengers had a ripple effect of enthusiasm. By the finale, both Drake and Sheila were shouting the 1930's phone

number of New York City's famous Pennsylvania Hotel, as loud as any of the other passengers. Confetti and ticker tape rained down from the upper decks.

By the time the ship steamed beneath the Golden Gate Bridge toward the rough sea known as the "Potato Patch," Drake and Sheila were comfortably ensconced in their starboard cabin. Looking through the twin portholes, Drake watched the July sun settle into the fog bank hovering off the coast, obscuring the tiny islands, known as the Farallones, where ancient, indigenous people believed was the home of the spirits of the dead. Drake came up behind his wife and encircled her with his bear-like arms. He gently brushed confetti from her hair.

In her ear he proposed, "Let's skip dinner tonight."

Sheila relaxed for a moment against his barrel-size chest, then cocked her head away from his lips. "Honey, don't muss my hair. We're seated at the Captain's Table tonight."

"I said let's skip it." He held her tighter.

She twisted away. "After what we paid for this theme cruise!"

"But..."

"We're eating every meal served on this boat."

"Ship, dear."

"Whatever." She continued, "Tonight we go formal, so get into that old tuxedo. I want to make a great first impression."

Drake turned to the tiny closet for the uncomfortable formal attire. The sun had dropped below the fog bank, turning into a pink-tinted film.

"Not much of a sunset," Sheila observed.

"Sunsets will be spectacular once we steam south."

"Oh?"

"But the last time I watched tropical sunsets, I also was on the lookout for Jap Zeros and torpedoes," Drake murmured as he struggled into the tux.

"Honey, don't think about the war! And don't use that dirty term!" Sheila shouted. "That was years ago." She came closer; her kiss surprised him. "Let me help you with the damn tie."

"I'm starving!" she added.

***

One of the three big bands aboard the ship was playing Artie Shaw's, "Stardust," when Drake and Sheila entered the huge dining room. Drake's keen ear listened for a sour note from the saxophones, but the sound was flawless. A white-jacketed Filipino escorted them to their reserved seats at the Captain's Table. The table seated seven couples along with Captain Schmidt Edwards. Introductions went smoothly. Drake was comfortable, smiling and shaking hands at all the right times. Like Drake, the other men were World War II vets—years later to be known as the "Greatest Generation"—but now prosperous CEOs from insurance, automobile, and manufacturing companies. After completing "Stardust," the band remained true to its 1940's sound and began playing the upbeat "Kalamazoo." Drake winked at Sheila to see if she remembered their first date on the University of Michigan campus. Sheila didn't catch his gesture as she consumed the last of her shrimp salad. Another waiter paused by Drake, looking at his plate, and asked if he was finished. Drake looked at his untouched Beef Wellington. He nodded yes.

"What's the matter, dear?" Sheila asked as the waiter removed the untouched plate. "Not seasick, are you?" she teased.

Drake sipped his glass of wine, recognizing the robust flavor of the Cab. "Good wine, isn't it?"

"Don't change the subject. What's wrong?" She put her fork down and studied him. "You look a little pale."

"I feel great; just not hungry."

"Please! Try this chocolate-filled eclair. It's divine."

"Dancing in the Dark," pivoted from the previous big band number. Drake recognized the first notes and asked, "Remember our first formal dance? On New Year's Eve?"

"I remember losing my corsage in the Ladies Room. You hadn't pinned it on properly."

"I was so nervous. Afraid I would stick you with the pin." He laid down his cloth napkin. "Let's dance."

Sheila hesitated. Only a few couples were on the polished dance floor. "I don't want to stand out. I feel so big."

Drake stood up. "Come on, Honey. This our music. It's our time."

He stood, softly clasped Sheila's hand, nodded to the other couples, and moved to the open floor. Multi-colored lights winked off the mirrored ball orbiting from above. He took Sheila in his arms, feeling the stiffness of her gown. The first trumpet player launched into Harry James' "I Had the Craziest Dream." Drake pulled Sheila closer and unconsciously began to hum in her ear. More couples moved onto the floor, crowding them closer. Above the bobbing and weaving couples, a single spotlight pinpointed a young woman singing next to the trumpeter. She resembled their daughter, Andrea, who worshiped Elvis Presley. Less than two years ago, Andrea was killed in drag race accident the night she had seen the same Elvis movie for the fourth time. Drake hated rock-n-roll.

***

The lighted ballroom lights diminished, and Drake was in the dark, putting his new 78 L.P. record on his portable RCA Victrola. It was a hot July night. There was no breeze coming through the 3rd floor open windows of his fraternity house. The only light was a tiny candle next to his bunk bed. The candle light haloed Sheila's long auburn hair as she lay in the narrow bed, with a flimsy sheet drawn up to her chin. Suddenly she let it fall, exposing her pert breasts to the rich yellow light. He took a deep breath and moved towards her, kneeling beside the creaking narrow mattress. In the shadows stood the silent bunks of his fraternity brothers, gone to work for the summer in defense plants or to enlist in the Army, Navy, or Marines. The bare mattresses were rolled up, revealing the

sagging metal webbing. As the muted music of Harry James' "You Made Me Love You," wafted over them, the webbing creaked as Drake slipped onto the bunk.

"I didn't want to do it / I didn't want to do it," continued the lyrics.

Sheila unbuttoned his sweat-soaked work shirt as the music gave way to the youthful voice of a young crooner, "Frank Something," singing "All or Nothing at All." Earlier in the day Drake had purchased the L.P. record with the last of his weekly pay. No lunches for the rest of the week. But, staring into Sheila's glistening eyes, he knew it was worth it. They sweated, strained, arched, and burst as the needle rasped on the heavy vinyl record. He heard her voice from a great distance.

"What?"

"Play it again," she whispered.

***

A polite knock on their cabin door woke Drake. A young, sleepy-eyed steward announced that brunch would be served until 11 A.M. Drake surveyed their cabin, noticing an unopened bottle of champagne on the tiny bureau. For a moment, he expected to see a big room full of empty bunks and feel the torpor of a another hot summer day in Ann Arbor, Michigan. But he was at sea with Sheila asleep beside him. Drake got up and went to a small enamel bowl and splashed cold water on his face. "Haven't had a dream like that in years," he said to his mirror image. Combing back his hair, he noticed it was darker and thicker.

In the afternoon they lounged in deck chairs and watched a school of sleek porpoise knife through the sea. As their dorsal fins disappeared for the last time under the waves, Sheila asked, "Do you remember last night?"

"Do I! It felt like we were in college again."

"It scared me, Honey."

"Why?"

"Because when I woke this morning and you weren't there," Sheila began, "I felt like I was still in college and had missed curfew."

Drake was quiet.

"Maybe we drank too much."

"Maybe," he answered, remembering the unopened bottle of champagne.

As Drake shaved before dressing for dinner their second night at sea, he studied his rugged face. He was certain there were less age lines. He smiled at his mirror image and anticipated another night of music, dancing and glorious excess. As Sheila slipped into her girdle, she anticipated a struggle. But she encountered no resistance. In spite of the rich meals she had consumed, she wondered if she was losing a pound or two. *I can only hope*, she thought.

In the ocean liner's huge dining room, Drake and Sheila were seated at a different table. One couple was already seated. Drake introduced his wife and himself and shook hands with a bank president from Indiana and smiled at his blonde wife. As their shrimp salad was served, Drake almost dropped his fork as he looked into the steel-gray eyes of his old XO from the war. Still smoking cigars, Max O'Dowl had not changed much. Drake felt Max inspect him as if he were just coming aboard the USS Barker, as the new Gunnery Officer, the first ninety-day wonder to serve on a tin-can destroyer that had already participated in two island invasions. Drake introduced Sheila. O'Dowl smiled but didn't say much. Watching both men was Maria, whom Drake learned was from Pacoima, California, and O'Dowl's third wife. O'Dowl's cigar smoke and description of his film production company dominated the dinner conversation. Drake got bored but was too polite to change the conversation. The third couple, the banker and wife, were entranced. Finally, the early evening band opened with "Begin the Beguine." Drake turned to Sheila, asking her to dance. Sheila shrugged him off, complaining she was too full and her feet hurt. "Later, Honey, OK?" she pleaded. Drake looked at Maria, but her big Latina eyes were on her husband.

Drake absorbed the music. He no longer heard O'Dowl, just a moving mouth wreathed in cigar smoke. The "Begin the Beguine" music faded away; Drake excused himself. He felt cold and cramped.

***

He was wearing his Mae West life preserver. Heavy blackout curtains hung over the portholes of the Officers' Mess. Drake clenched a white ceramic mug of black coffee hard to keep his hands from shaking in front of the red-eyed, bearded officers, wearing khaki and life-jackets, all around him. The portable radio on the long mess room table crackled and sputtered with static, ending the music of "Begin the Beguine," as Tokyo Rose told the men it was 17 A. M., July Fifteenth, and today they would all die.

OOOGAH. OOGAH!

The "All Battle Stations" warning drowned-out Tokyo Rose's shrill metallic voice. Drake dropped his coffee mug and grabbed his steel helmet from the rack along the bulkhead. The sirens mobilized his weary shipmates. They scrambled topside to their battle stations. The early morning sun was obscuring the lead Japanese pilot who peeled-off his Zero from the attacking V-formation. The pilot dropped low, the rising sun behind his fighter/bomber, and aimed for the destroyer. Drake dove for protection behind a lifeboat davit as the Zero machine gunned the top deck. Wood splinters and shrapnel bounced and pinged off his helmet as he rolled into a tight fetal position. The screaming Zero climbed steeply. Drake was up and running along the debris covered deck. As he passed the first starboard gun mount, he saw the Zero circle for a second strafing. Both mount gunners were dead; the electrical firing mechanism had melted. Drake clambered behind the muzzles of the twin A-A cannons and re-set the controls on manual. He loaded the magazines and slipped into the sticky, blood-stained leather harness. The Zero came in low. Drake set the twin sites on the thickest part of the fuselage. He could see the two-hundred-pound bomb racked to the belly of the airplane. He knew the pilot would target the Barker's highest

stack. Drake continued to hose the Zero with anti-aircraft rounds, but the bomber came closer and closer. The pilot released the bomb. Two hundred pounds of TNT went down the ship's smokestack and into the Engine Room.

***

Drake woke up sweating. He didn't feel the familiar pitch and roll of the ocean liner. He looked around for something familiar. He saw a tired, young man with a red cross stenciled on his wrinkled white uniform, moving among make-shift cots. He heard the heavy booming of sixteen-inch battleship broadsides. Around Drake young men in blood-smeared, burnt khaki clothing writhed and groaned on small cots. The tired-looking Medic mechanically clutched Drake's left wrist and felt his pulse.

"Where... where am I?"

"Hospital ship." The medic scrutinized Drake's pupils with a tiny pen light. He scratched on his clipboard: *Normal. Pupils & Pulse.*

"Okay. You can go back to your unit now." The medic pulled the coarse, Navy-issue wool blanket off Drake. "We need this cot."

"But—"

"C'mon! It's check-out time, *sir*."

"This is madness...I'm a civilian...this can't be happening."

The medic stared at Drake, then spit-out the words, "Ninety-day wonder!" He walked away and returned a few minutes later with a squad of Marines. In full combat gear, six grim, silent men picked up Drake, two at his legs, two at his shoulders, one lead, one aft, and carried him below to the brig. The steel-gray heavy door slammed shut with a clang of finality. Drake peered into the gloomy darkness and then vomited from the foul-smelling stench.

"It takes some time getting used to."

He turned from the splattered toilet and saw a dark figure in the gloomy shadows. "Who are you?"

"Jared. Seaman Second Class, aboard the Yorktown. Or was." He saw Drake's single brass bar pinned to his ragged, bloody khaki shirt collar. "Wow! An officer. What are you doin' here, *sir*?

"I don't know...this has gotta be a nightmare."

"That's what I thought when I got drafted," Jared said. "All I wanted to do was play my horn. Next thing I know. I'm on a flattop, heading towards Saipan, for the invasion."

"Saipan?" Drake interrupted. "What year is this?"

"Forty-Four. What year did you think it was?"

***

Drake felt a tug at his sleeve. The dark, rotten-smelling brig dissolved and the familiar music grew louder. He looked up and saw the aging face of Jared, playing trumpet, accompanied by the cruise ship's big band, wailing "Sentimental Journey."

"Drake, honey?"

He turned and saw Sheila grasping his arm.

"Can we sit down now. My feet are killing me."

He looked down at her. Sheila's face was puffy from the wine; her eyes had lost their shine.

"Besides, you seem a million miles away." Sheila pulled him towards their dinner table. He saw Max, his war-time Executive Officer, still chomping on his cigar. The third couple at their table was still entranced by his Hollywood stories.

"Drake, why are you shaking? And your shirt is soaked!"

"Can't we go on deck...I really need some fresh air."

"Not me, Hon'. I got to sit down...these new pumps are torture. Like foot-binding."

"Okay. I'll go alone." Drake kissed her and walked through the grand ballroom to the fantail of the ship. The full moon was high and its light silvered the wake of the huge ocean liner. As the ship plunged through the calm Pacific Ocean, Drake grabbed the cool, wet, iron railing and forced himself to breathe slowly. Breathe in through the nose; breathe out through the mouth. He looked at the

dark, rolling sea and heard the first notes of a song he could never forget.

It was a gray November afternoon. Navy Day, 1946. Drake savored Sheila's first kiss in two years. The were on a pier in San Francisco and covered with confetti and ticker tape. The Navy Band was playing in synch with a Doris Day recording of "Sentimental Journey."

"I can't go through this again," he whispered to himself. Wide-eyed, his hands grasping the iron railing, legs spread apart for balance, Drake peered into the dark, rolling water. A streak of white light knifed through the dark ocean. It came straight at the immense hull of the ocean liner. He watched the streak without moving, gleefully knowing it would be over soon. Drake braced himself for the inevitable shock wave.

Lady of the Woods

Dillon MacEwen

Chisels and Cracks

Caitlin Donovan

He led me through his stately garden. Pale, bloodless bodies crowded each other so tightly in his garden that there was no room for any plant to grow. All signs of life had been choked out by the silent, staring statues. We were forced to walk slowly through the narrow path between each row.

He kept stopping, adjusting his chiton, fiddling with his orange sash. He wanted me to examine every single sculpture, clearly. I put on a pretense of doing so but never said anything. It was amusing, watching him fidget and scuff his sandal on the ground like a frustrated child. He clearly hated how I wouldn't look at him directly.

Finally, he cleared his throat, "How familiar are you with sculpture, sir?"

"Very familiar," I replied. "I've created many of my own."

"A fellow artist! I would enjoy seeing your work, I'm sure." I had to bite back a laugh at the insincerity in his tone. It was clear he thought I couldn't possibly measure up to his skill. I could only imagine how much greater his condescension would be if he knew I was a woman. Thankfully, he'd made his own assumptions. I wore a hooded cloak, had a naturally deep voice, traveled alone, and most importantly, I'd brazenly shown him my coin. So, he thought of me as man and had to pretend to respect me.

He smiled tightly at me. "I seek your opinion as a craftsman, then. My goal was to capture the ideal form. Would you say I've succeeded?"

"These statues are the essence of the gods themselves," I said. He glowed, taking it as a complement. I didn't mean it as one. His forms were flawless, all chiseled muscle and sensual curves,

each immaculate detail carefully crafted, every blemish buffed out. It was unsettling. They were alien, grotesque. Indeed, just like every god I had ever met.

I longed for a jagged scar, a laugh line, a lopsided mouth, a bumpy nose. Instead, the ivory was smooth and plain. I hated how they all shared the same vacant smile. My own work had so many varied expressions.

"That was my aim, sir." He leaned forward and stroked the cheek of one of the same-faced women, tracing his fingers over her slack and silent mouth, then moving them down to the curve of her breast. "I would never claim she rivals the beauty of lady Aphrodite, but..." He actually *squeezed* it. "She certainly outdoes any other woman."

I dug my fingers into the sides of my thighs and choked down a hiss of rage. Truly this man would get along with the gods, especially *him*. I turned away, but there was nowhere to look. It was either his poisonous hunger or those witless faces, and both options made my skin crawl.

Would I be revolted by her as well? She would likely be as passive and empty-headed as the rest of them looked. After all, she'd stayed so long with this loathsome man and his bloated ego. Was I truly so desperate for company?

Said loathsome man finally stopped his squeezing. Disappointed that I hadn't laughed at his foolishness, he stalked towards his house. I followed him.

His estate was impressive, made of strong and solid stone. It contrasted the mud-dried brick of the huts around it, but the inside was as cold and dark as a tomb. Once again, there was nothing but statue upon statue. I noticed, however, that they weren't all whole. Though it was hard to see, there were bits of rubble, smashed stone, even a stray foot.

I ignored it. "I've heard you have a masterpiece. One blessed by the gods. Might I see?"

His face fell. "Ah, yes. Everyone wants to see that one. I must warn you; it turned out different than I expected. You'll be disappointed. I have others that are more—"

"I want to see her, please." I'd made up my mind. If her head was empty, I would fill it up with knowledge. If she was tedious, I would teach her to be interesting. Once she was mine, she could be molded. I just needed to grab her and leave this awful, dead place behind.

"Fine," he muttered. "But I did warn you."

He took me through his maze of ivory to a small room in the back. He unlocked it with a rusty key and pulled it open.

"Here she is," he said bitterly. "My Galatea."

She sat on a stool in the center of the room that was utterly barren, except for a small table in the corner littered with chisels and other instruments.

She was perfectly still, not even opening her eyes as I stepped into the room. She looked much like the other statues. Her lips were a cupid's bow, her nose was straight and small. Her skin was that same cold ivory, her hips were perfectly curved, her curls fell in well-formed rivulets across her shoulders. But there was something different—there were imperfections.

"You see the cracks on her face and arms, I take it. Only vestiges of beauty remain," the sculptor called Pygmalion told me. "She no longer speaks much either. But I assure you, all you've heard is true. Lady Aphrodite brought my exquisite creation to life. See how her chest rises and falls?"

I'd certainly noticed that, but I'd also noticed something else. Namely, her hand and foot. Both looked like they'd been smashed apart, then clumsily rebuilt, chunks of stone stuck haphazardly together. I strode forward and bent down to examine them.

"She's decaying. She's falling apart in body as well as mind," he informed me. "There is some curse upon her now though I do not know who cast it. I rebuild her again and again, but what was once a

perfect wife is now a shambles!"

"Is that the truth?" I asked Galatea. Her eyes flew open. She looked at me wonderingly, startled to be directly addressed. But she remained silent.

Pygmalion didn't notice. He'd turned away, like he couldn't bear to look at her. "Of course it is! Look at how she cracks and crumbles!"

"May I?" I said, my hands hovering above her face. She nodded almost imperceptibly. I ran my fingers across her cheeks. My fingers tingled as they dipped into those divots he so despised. There was a strange warmth to her stone skin. "Hmm. As I thought. Those are not cracks. She's simply aging."

Pygmalion sputtered, but I smiled, taking in each wrinkle and fold appreciatively. They crisscrossed across her face, forming a kind of constellation, proof of a life lived. I especially liked the line near her mouth. I imagined it deepened when she smiled. I wanted to see that.

It seemed to take a second for my words to sink in, but when they did, Galatea finally unclasped her hands. "I am?" She spoke, her voice trembling, scratchy from disuse.

Pygmalion squawked in surprise.

"Yes," I told her softly. "You aren't broken."

"You are mistaken, sir," Pygmalion interrupted in a strangled voice. "Lady Aphrodite told me I had created the visage of a perfect woman, one worthy of life. She would not allow it to shrivel with time—"

"Did she say that? Or did you just assume?"

He simply gaped at me, and that was answer enough.

I shook my head. "Aphrodite would not create another unaging beauty. Word is she's not fond of competition."

"You seem to know a lot about the gods, stranger." Galatea's voice was stronger now. Even through my veil, she found and held my gaze. My heartbeat echoed in my ears. It was as if she'd come into

focus. Everything about her was sharper. Her white eyes narrowed at me. "And something... is flowing through me. What are you?"

"Galatea, you talk out of turn!" her creator thundered. "Remember what *you* are! Show our guest some respect!" Pygmalion stalked toward her.

She flinched, slipping out of focus. She drew herself in tightly, clutching her shattered hand. She regarded him with a wounded gaze, whispering "I apologize, sir."

My heart seized in my chest. I was transported back to years ago, eons ago.

A small girl huddled on the temple floor as the god of the sea loomed over her. Poseidon grabbed her wrist, jerking her towards him. She held her breath and closed her eyes as his violent waves pulled her under. She made herself small as he demanded of her and did whatever it took to survive. And when Athena looked down at her with cold, imperious eyes and told her it was all her fault, the girl had believed her.

How had I forgotten, even for a moment? How could I have thought myself superior and sought to claim her? I knew better than anyone how a man like him could chisel faults into you while telling you'd been broken from the start. Then he would work his filthy fingers into those cracks until his hands never left you.

Rage burned in my veins. I could not just watch anymore.

"I'll show you what I am." I stepped toward Galatea, shoving the sculptor reaching for her aside.

I ripped off my hood and veil. My snakes unfurled at last, hissing and writhing. They were very cross from being cooped up so long. Galatea gasped. The man screamed deliciously.

"Medusa!" he yelped. I heard him scramble away. In his mad dash, he crashed against the wall and tumbled to the floor alongside his crafting table. My reputation preceded me.

I ignored him, addressing Galatea as I focused my eyes on the floor "Let me show you what you are truly made of."

She nodded. I fixed my gaze on her and concentrated on her hand. Dark and gleaming stone filled in the shattered mess Pygmalion had made. The carelessly applied plaster fell away like dead skin. She flexed her fingers. They were stiff and awkward, but her movements were solid and strong and completely her own. Next, I focused on her foot, weaving the stone carefully. Sweat poured down my brow. Finally, it was done. "You can try standing on it, if you like."

She got up, wobbling a bit. The foot dragged. I was no Aphrodite. I could not breathe life into the stone I created. But I'd made something she could truly lean on, if she wanted to.

Pygmalion, still trembling in the corner, made a noise of disgust. She simply stared at her new hand. "How does it feel?" I asked, my voice so gentle it sounded like a stranger's.

"I love it," she said, loud and ringing. And at long last, she smiled. That line around her mouth deepened beautifully. A heady warmth flooded me. My snakes peered at me with curious black eyes, and I wanted to hide myself from their gaze.

"And I love your snakes." Her tone was almost conversational as she wobbled toward me. "I haven't seen much of the outside world. Do many humans have those on their head?"

"That is no human, Galatea! That is a monster!" Pygmalion had finally found his voice again, it seemed. "You must get away from the Gorgon before she damages you further!"

Galatea froze.

I ignored him. "It's not common for humans at all. Athena, a goddess, cursed me," I explained to her pointing at my snakes. "But I'm very fond of my pets now, though. They adore being stroked. The green one on my right side is Chrestos. The brown one above him is Xenia—"

"Stop talking to her, monster! How dare you damage my work! How dare you claim to be an *artist*!"

I laughed and cocked my head toward him. He faced me

now, which would have been very brave, if not for the fact he had screwed his eyes shut.

"I never made that claim." I stroked Xenia as her tongue flicked against my cheek. She was my favorite, secretly. The others could never know. "I merely told you that I created statues. And I do have a beautiful collection."

"Galatea!" he snapped. "You are not allowed to go with her! Remember I gave you everything you are!"

Galatea shrunk in on herself. Her shoulders bowed. But she shook her head furiously.

I took that as my cue. I marched toward the man. He heard my approach and raised a hand to strike me; I easily caught it. Xenia lunged forward, nipping him on the ear. He went rigid. "I'm no artist, but there is an art to what I do." I moved to pull his eyelids open.

"Stop!" Galatea cried out behind me. "Wait! He doesn't deserve this!"

My heart sank. She was going to plead for him. It wasn't surprising. When Athena told me that I should have been honored by Poseidon's attention, I'd believed her. Galatea probably still felt indebted to Pygmalion. She owed him nothing, and he did deserve it, but I couldn't make that choice for Galatea. Far too many choices had been taken from her already.

I turned toward her, resigned. As I did, he cried out in desperate relief. "You see now, creature! She would never betray me. My love is what made her!"

"Your love would unmake me, too," Galatea hissed. She stood tall, and she looked at me, not him. "Don't do it. He isn't worthy of being your art. He shouldn't be immortalized."

"Are you sure? It would be very poetic for him to become the flawed art he hates."

"*No*," she said peevishly. "I don't want him to become anything like me. When you looked at me, I felt the strength of the stone inside of me, and I was proud. I don't want him to feel that." She

lifted her chin and put her hands on her hips. Her shaking ceased.

I marveled at her lovely stubbornness. She saw my power as a force of creation, a source of strength, not as chaos and destruction. The enormity of that hit me, and I blinked back tears. I took a step towards her.

I was interrupted by the crash of the craft table toppling. I whipped around. The man lunged at me, eyes closed, a chisel in his hand. Xenia's venom had worn off. Cursing myself for being so sloppy, I raised my hands to shield my neck. But before the man could find his mark, a stone hand slammed down on his skull. He crumpled to the ground, blood gushing from the side of his head. The chisel slid from his limp fingers and skittered across the floor.

"Also, I prefer it that he feels pain," Galatea snarled. As the man moaned and scrabbled weakly for his fallen chisel, she picked it up instead. And she went to work.

It turned out Galatea was far more poetic than I was.

***

After Galatea scrubbed the blood from her hands and we fitted her with the one shift she owned, we left. When we reached the garden, she stopped and looked back and the palatial house.

"I've only left here once before," she told me distantly. "It was when this appeared." She showed me a wrinkle on her hand. "I hid it, knowing he wouldn't like it. But I never expected him to grab that hammer. When I struck back and he fell, I thought I'd killed him. I rushed into town, looking for help, escape, anything. But everyone who saw me screamed and ran. I realized he was right. Nobody else would accept me. I had nowhere to go." She took a deep, shuddering breath. "So, I nursed him back to health, and he forgave me so sweetly, he put my hand back together so tenderly, he told me it would be better this time. I believed him. But the mark returned and..."

She closed her eyes.

I took her shaking hand and ran my thumb softly over the

fold. "I like it," I told her. "It's the shape of a snake's tail."

She laughed. Her whole face became a wonderful collage of creases. "That's the sweetest complement I've ever received."

"I must be honest, Galatea." I let go of her hand, facing her grimly. "I was alone for a very long time. When I heard there was a woman made of living stone, one who could endure my gaze, I only wished to have you. Just like that cretin, I didn't care what you thought of it. But now I would rather die than go down his path. You ought to go on your own journey. I'll give you what you need to make your start. Don't worry about the people. Trust there would be far more running and screaming if *I* was with you"

Galatea considered me for a minute, her face blank and unreadable. Then she smiled, that wonderful line by her mouth deepening like a winding river. "I don't mind screams as much anymore. And I know the desperation of loneliness. You were the first to truly see me, Medusa. I'll stay by your side a bit longer." She looked up at me with a twinkle in her eye. "You still need to tell me all the names of your snakes, after all!"

I could swear those same damned snakes were snickering at me as I fought a lump in my throat.

We left the mewling man to his silent mausoleum. Galatea was holding my hand. When she squeezed it, I wondered if a girlish blush appeared on my mottled gray cheeks.

I wondered what she'd think of my garden. When she saw how some of those faces were twisted masks of horror, mouths open in a soundless yell, would she think it as terribly beautiful as I did—or would she run away in disgust?

I was excited to find out.

Economically-Halved Grapefruit

Julius Coggins

3 Miles to Next Exit

Emma V. Owen

When I was ten years old, Mama ran away with me in the back of the car. It was raining that day. It had been raining since the very early morning when she shook me awake. The mud-spattered, rusty-hubcapped Prius stood with its hatch open in the driveway. I threw my packed duffle bag into the back, next to Mama's suitcases.

Mama didn't tell me where we were going. Or why. Or when we'd be back. I didn't think to ask. There was something *exciting* about all of it. The stillness and the secrecy as I dashed through the rain from the doorstep of Grandma's old two-story house, framed by its flowerbeds of wilting marigolds. Marigolds that danced and sparkled as rain pelted them.

I swung into the seat behind Mama's, pulling the door shut before the wind blew the rain inside. I sucked the rainwater from the end of the braid Mama had put into my hair before school yesterday. Her seatbelt clicked, and the car started with a quiet *whirr.*

In the dark, the old, faded roads looked new again, painted tar-black by the rain. We merged onto the highway, alone except for the few early-risers on their way to work. The sign reading, in chipped letters, *Longbranch, North Carolina Welcomes You* soon zipped by us.

Away.

I fell asleep shortly after sunrise. I didn't wake up until the car came to a sudden, jolting stop that flung me to the side and knocked my head against the window. Mama swore under her breath at the driver who'd pulled out in front of her at the intersection. She didn't ask if I was all right.

I rubbed at the swelling spot on the side of my head as

Mama stepped on the gas again.

***

Grandma invited some of her friends over last week. A couple of older Southern ladies whose syrupy-accented voices carried from the kitchen to where I sat doing math homework on the couch.

Mama was working late. She'd been working late more and more frequently these past few weeks. I couldn't fall asleep until I heard the door close downstairs. Until she switched off the hallway light that Grandma always left on.

I could see Grandma and the two other women through the open doorway into the kitchen. Grandma put out the non-stained lacy white tablecloth for the occasion, as well as the one matching set of china.

I *thwipped* my pencil on my math worksheet. Division. The assignment was to write out all the common denominators. I tried to focus on the problems, but snippets of conversation from the next room kept sneaking in towards me.

"Beatrice had her baby Tuesday," one of the women said, her spoon clinking as she set it down on a porcelain saucer. "That makes me a grandma now, too, Louise."

"Beatrice was in the same class as your Jane, wasn't she Louise?" The other woman asked. I perked up at the mention of Mama's name. I could just see the back of Grandma's head from my spot on the couch. Her hair was brown, like mine and Mama's, with only a few streaks of grey in it.

Grandma nodded. "That's right."

"And Margaret's nine now?" The second lady said.

"Ten."

"Well, my goodness, time flies."

Grandma's hand tightened around her teacup.

I got up off the couch and tiptoed toward the doorway. I stuck close to the wall beside a tasseled lamp, carefully peering into the kitchen.

"You're a real angel, Louise," the first woman, round-faced with red hair, said. "What with all you've done for Jane after what happened."

Grandma swatted the compliment away with a hand. "Angel nothing, Stella. Anyone would do the same. 'Specially for that little girl's sake. Jane keeps fightin' me for getting involved, bless her heart, but she don't know the first thing about raising a child."

I peered around the edge of the doorway, where the carpet turned to patterned linoleum.

The second woman nodded solemnly. "She was so young."

"She's *still* young, Esther. She doesn't know what's good for her." Grandma lowered her voice, and I leaned in closer to hear. My nose wrinkled at the warring fragrances of three different perfumes. Grandma's was the strongest: lilac. She kept it in a glass bottle on her dresser.

"I don't want that child making the same mistake Jane did," Grandma said. "If she would just understand that..."

Mistake. The word made me flinch. Grandma and her friends tried to be so careful with what they said, but it didn't escape me that all my friends' parents were older than Mama was. I noticed the looks people gave each when they heard me call her "Mama." I saw the way they shook their heads and whispered—a mix of pity and scorn.

"Margaret, honey." Grandma folded her hands on the table. *Uh oh.* I was only *Margaret* when I was in trouble. "Do you need something?"

I'd planned to say I was just getting a drink of water, but that seemed a weak excuse now. I shook my head.

"Go finish your homework, Margaret. This is grownup business."

I muttered an apology and hurried back to my common denominators.

***

After several hours of driving, the idea of running away was losing its appeal. I was stiff and uncomfortable from spending all morning and part of the afternoon in the car. The smell of the pine-tree air freshener was giving me a headache.

I picked at the pink sequins on my T-shirt. The rain was still coming down outside, battling the windshield wipers. The one on the right got stuck every few swipes, knocking their *tha-thunk, tha-thunk* rhythm out of sync. I poked the back of Mama's seat with the toe of my tennis shoe. She didn't seem to notice.

Running away was so different in books. I'd read *The Boxcar Children* when I got it as a gift for my tenth birthday. The idea of *escaping*, of trekking out alone had lodged itself into my imagination. And even though the bedsheet ladder I made wasn't long enough to reach the ground below my second-story window, even though the big flashlight I'd found in the storage closet didn't have any batteries, and even though my stash of rations had only earned me a scolding from Mama when they attracted ants, I never got bored of the game.

But it had been *just* a game, and there was always a make-believe boxcar waiting in the woods. Mama's version of running away was nothing like that.

I looked up at her reflection in the rear-view mirror. There were tired circles around her eyes and her wispy brown hair was tucked back with a pair of tortoiseshell sunglasses. Her lips were tightly pulled together as she looked straight ahead at the highway. She didn't even glance back at me.

***

I was sitting at the top of the stairs Thursday night, two days before I'd packed my things in the back of Mama's car. The stairs were old, polished wood with a barred railing I sometimes pretended was a cage that looked out over the ocean of the living room.

I was sitting at the top of the stairs even though it was past my bedtime, and I had school the next day. Grandma was still

awake. I could see her sitting on the stuffed chair downstairs. She stood up at the sound of the door creaking open. I couldn't see the door from where I sat, but I heard Grandma's footsteps across the floor. The keys in Mama's coat pocket jingled as she hung it up on the hook by the door.

"Saw you withdrew a pretty big amount from the account, Jenny," Grandma said. She was still using Mama's nickname. That was a good sign.

I moved down a few steps, carefully. This was more "grownup business," and I knew I shouldn't be listening.

Mama stepped past Grandma into the living room. "It's *my* money, Ma. I made it at my job." She had a hint of a Southern accent to her voice as well. It always seemed more prominent when she was talking to Grandma.

Grandma crossed her arms. "Don't think I don't know what you're planning."

"You don't get a say in my life anymore, Ma."

"I get *every* say, honey. I've taken care of both you and that child for twenty-six years. You won't last a minute on your own. I think you know better than to ruin your own life twice."

"Maggie is *my* daughter!" Mama said. She hardly ever raised her voice, but she raised it then. "Not yours! You don't get to use her to redeem yourself from the disgrace I turned out to be."

"I just want what's best for her," Grandma said slowly. She made her way back to the chair, smoothing her skirt before she sat down.

"So do I," Mama said.

I gripped the railing tightly. I was no stranger to Mama and Grandma's fights. They argued more than they didn't. About who drove me to school, about the foods Mama packed for my lunch, about how much time Mama spent at work.

I tried to stay out of their arguments. I stayed in my room and pretended I was somewhere else. I covered my ears when Mama

clanked the pots and pans together as she washed the dishes. I nudged Grandma's flowerpots out of the way when she purposefully left them on the doorstep. But as much as I tried to remove myself from their fights, I couldn't change the fact that their arguments were always about me.

I retreated into the upstairs hallway, into my room. I was the common denominator in their equation. I was the mistake.

***

Mama pulled into a rest stop in Pennsylvania. It was small: a parking lot, a bathroom stall, and a covered pavilion with three concrete picnic tables under it. Mama and I sat at the middle table after stretching our legs on the short gravel trail.

She gave me a bottle of juice and a packet of sour gummies she'd picked up at a gas station a few exits back. She got a cold coffee drink for herself.

I chewed on the end of my braid. "How much longer?"

"A little over an hour," Mama said. She looked down at her hands. "We're going to see a friend of mine in Pittsburgh."

"Are we gonna stay there a long time?"

Mama glanced at the little white car in the parking lot. "I don't know."

A fuzzy caterpillar, brown with a black stripe around it, crawled along the edge of the picnic table. I watched as it made its way across the concrete surface. "I have school. I have friends back home." I set my finger in the caterpillar's path, and it inched over my knuckle, its spiky legs tickling me as it went.

Mama pushed her hair away from her temples. "I know." She said it like she'd given it a lot of thought.

And I knew, too. I knew what running away was, even if it wasn't in a book. Mama wasn't going to return to Longbranch.

Tears stung at my eyes. I wanted to scream at her then. How could she not care about the effect her choice had on me? Did she think she could just pack me up in the back of the car like I was an-

other of her suitcases?

But I didn't scream. I looked at Mama. I looked her in the eyes: wide and green like mine. The caterpillar had made its way all the way to the corner of the table, and it disappeared from my view. Across a table was a long journey for a caterpillar. It was too small to see the end of that vast slab. It just had to trust that whatever was at the end of that journey was worth it. Mama held my gaze, her expression sorrowful, guilty, and full of a pain I was too young to understand.

I picked up the drink and the gummies from the picnic table and walked back toward the parking lot. The tiny pieces of gravel on the small trail crunched under my feet. I looked back at Mama when I reached the parking lot. I looked past her, the highway on one side, the forest on the other. Maybe, I thought, there was a boxcar hidden in that forest. Maybe someday I would find it. My shoes scuffed against the faded lines of paint in the parking lot.

I got back in the car and slammed the door.

Till Again

Channa Alterman

purgatory.

Olivia Gamache

it's the in-between, the
cracks amid,
the stretches of outside visible
on my melting windshield,
warm air blasting noisily,
garishly, on ice.

the purgatory of the year,
and i am reflecting.

to think that few things last in this world,
which is all the more reason to live.

to know nothing is certain—
not the cat i am still hoping for
or that job or that trip.
not the sort of love that bowls me over
or that thing i only wish for
when the ceiling fan can't make out my face
—and yet we still dream.

the world could end tomorrow,
better in winter,
than spring—more fitting, already six feet under.
better when the trees shake
like skeletons without skin
and you walk outside and are the only thing alive.

and still, i go on living.
the blades of grass that peek through the crevices,
the swipe of my windshield wipers and things are once more clear.

yes, the world could end tomorrow
but i woke up today.

Here's to the Villian Who Writes His Own Poem

Jeff Horner

And he names all your demons by cutting out words
from your grandma's response to apartheid.

And he folds up the clock face against its tight grain
to measure your time of departure.

And he nickels and dimes his way across town
to foster his investigation.

And he sits on his haunches when *push* comes to *shove*,
and upward, that buoyancy lifts you.

And he badgers the witness, cherubic in counsel,
for the grace of his dour congregation.

And he empties his vessel upon these parched cinders—
erosion, the Earth's invocation.

And he showers the morning you first got away
with the crimes of your own incantation.

And he farts on the downbeat of the band's *ad libitum*
as fire licks walls indiscreetly.

And he taunts you—quite tall—from the edge of deceit,
blames it all on his predestination.

And he can't let the narrative go that he started
because of its comfortable rhythms.

And he can't let the narrative go that they started
because of its ancestral echo.

And he asked for forgiveness,
and continues to ask;

may you find yourself in that discernment.

Leftovers

Laura Dame

I don't like them.
A synonym for leftover is residue.
Why would I want to eat residue?
The meal is never the same reheated anyway.

I fret often over the heteronormativity that still tries to drive my life.
I'm eating my own heart out over it, shoveling
down my angst in private each night.

Like how I am in love with a woman,
I am in love with a woman, and yet
my heart thinks I'm missing out on some prince charming
romance that I never got because I had a boyfriend
who was awful and then fell in love with a woman
and I've never felt the infatuation of a man.

I've left the stir-fry pot sitting out too long tonight
and now it is hard to clean. Even the Tuffy Scrubber can't
budge the dried on scraps. I will have to let it soak
overnight in soapy water and hope, in the morning,
it is more willing to come clean.

I feel guilt for the scraps of hellbent grief that wonder
why haven't I been wooed by a man? The question feels like an illegitimate child.
My womb balloons with passé ideals and I have to hide
the bulge.

But the question will soak away.
It will wash clean.
I can scrub it off.
Elbow grease and time.

I make out with her.
Soft lips dissolving together.
Her breasts pressed against mine.
The work is good, the waiting wonderful.

I can feel my skin coming clean under her friction.
It's a good chafing, let the poisoned blood go.

I'll come clean, I'll come clean.

Stimuli

Morgan M. P.

The First Day

Stella Rising Waymouth

Humans tend to attribute significance to beginnings and endings. When the sun rises, we celebrate it by seizing the day, and when someone dies, we mourn. But when that loved one drew their last breath, a child in a classroom was growing drowsy with boredom; an artist in a coffeeshop watched each new customer idly, wondering when inspiration might strike; and that monumental thing, death, affected only those who knew its victim. In the same way, as you read this piece, perhaps a bit unimpressed, a baby is being born; a war is ending; there are beginnings and endings all around you that you know nothing about. That is the nature of things, in this infinity of time and human experiences that surround us. Every moment is significant, and every moment is inconsequential. It's all a matter of perspective.

On the dawn of days, someone in the world must have paid no heed. A hermit living in a cave, skin so pale you wouldn't question that she'd never seen sunlight—milky eyes and bony wrists, and a disposition of apathy and lethargy. Oh, everyone else in the world could hardly contain their excitement at the prospect of sunlight, but in this pocket of darkness, you would've found nothing but indifference. She liked her peace, her quiet, and she didn't care for much else. Her name was Lyanoth.

Her sister was different. Saja knew that she would be the first to sprint towards the light when it arose, and the first to lie in the soft grass when it sparkled with dew. She would dance and sing with the songbirds the moment they opened their eyes, and she would be the first to splash up water from the creek and adore the sparkling rainbows cast by the sun. But if there was one thing Saja wanted more than to be the first, it was to have her sister beside, and

prove to her that the outside world was worth knowing. And now, standing in the mouth of Lyanoth's cave, she was getting frustrated.

"Have you no curiosity?" she demanded. "No wants, no fears, no inclinations? This day will be the greatest day of our lives, and here you are, shying into the shadows!"

"Leave me, sister," Lyanoth hissed, shuffling into a further corner of the cave. She was half-hidden by a low shelf of rock, her long, matted hair spilling out like a river over the top of it. "Have your fun, and I will stay here. I do not wish to see the sun; I fear it will be blinding."

"You cannot know that!" countered Saja. The bloodred dawn rising behind her cast a long and distinct shadow ahead of her, mimicking her angry gesticulations as she spoke. "You have never set a single foot outside of this dark, incorrigible cave. You know nothing of the world, and so you have no basis for predictions."

"And I don't *care* to know of the world," her sister said. Her hand, resting on the ground to her side, curled into a clawed fist. "Leave me and have your fun."

Saja drew herself up, and there was a long moment of silence as she considered. Then she sniffed, turning her nose up at her sister. "Fine, then. I will."

Lyanoth sighed to herself and sat back, a slight smirk on her face. *Let Saja spend all her time investigating these meaningless little novelties*, she thought to herself. *I'm perfectly happy where I am. I've spent a lifetime here, after all.*

After several minutes, she sighed again. "Your shadow betrays you, sister."

Saja, still loitering at the edge of the cave entrance, cursed.

"Funny thing, shadows," Lyanoth added in a musing tone, her voice not mocking for once. Saja brightened a little. Perhaps this was something she could use—an interest in something brought upon by the new dawn. "They're quite horrible, I think," Lyanoth continued, and Saja instantly chastised herself for ever having hope

in her sister's aptitude for positivity. "They've been distracting me ever since the sun rose. Now I can sense everything that happens outside the cave, just because of the change of light. Even if I were to cover the entrance, some of the light would still get through."

"Is it really such a miserable thing, to be aware of your surroundings?" Saja asked, sounding a bit resigned now, but evidently still unwilling to leave alone. "Doesn't this cave ever bore you?"

"Of course it doesn't," Lyanoth snapped. "Everything is always the same here. *I'm* always the same here."

Saja didn't know how to respond to that for a moment. "Exactly, sister," she said finally, a bit incredulous. "Everything's always the same. Repetitive. Monotonous, even. Don't you long for something different? For something to surprise you?"

Lyanoth shuddered. "You know perfectly well that I've always hated surprises. I'm happy like this, able to predict everything and never in danger."

Saja frowned at that. "What danger would you be in if you stepped outside? It's the First Day, for goodness sake, there isn't much that exists yet."

"But you admit that it does exist," Lyanoth caught her. "And I don't know what it is, or how it is, or where it is. And I don't intend on finding out."

"You don't understand!" Saja cried, beginning to pace back and forth. "While you've just been staring at a blank patch of rock your whole life, I've *done* things, *been* places. I know what the outside world feels and sounds like, while you cringe at the tiniest sliver of sunlight. How can you reject something if you don't even know what it is you're avoiding?" Her anger marched her, fuming, inside the cave, where she stopped before her sister, glaring at her. "If you won't get up yourself, then I swear I'll make you."

Lyanoth laughed in her face. "Try, then, sister. I won't budge."

And so Saja did. She grasped at Lyanoth's arm and tried to

yank her to standing, but Lyanoth clawed at Saja's hand with her sharp fingernails and forced her to relinquish her hold. She wrapped her arms around her sister's torso, a malicious embrace, but Lyanoth seemed impossibly heavy and wriggled from her grasp before Saja could find a way to lift her. Saja grabbed her ankles and tried to drag her sister backwards, but Lyanoth kicked back at her, and she stumbled away, panting. Saja glared at her and dusted off her forearms, her eyes narrowing determinedly.

"If it's the last thing I do, I will make sure you see the sun before it sets," she insisted vehemently. "I will make sure you witness the First Day."

Lyanoth began to laugh at this, a slow laugh at first but real enough, then devolving into an all-consuming cackle that had her gasping for breath. Saja took a step back and frowned. She couldn't fathom what had amused her sister so.

"What?" she demanded finally, advancing menacingly on her sister. "What's funny?"

"Oh, nothing," Lyanoth replied, wiping a tear from the corner of her eye. "But you should ask yourself, which of us are you more set on witnessing this oh-so-important day? Because if you'd like to see the First Day for yourself, you'd better go right now. There's not a second to waste."

Saja gasped in horror and looked around the bend of the cave wall. The sunlight was bloodred as it had been before, but now the sun was sinking rather than rising. She dashed for the cave's entrance, but it was far too late. The sun dipped under the horizon just as she passed beneath the lip of stone. The world was darkening at an alarming rate, and Saja could only stare, speechless.

Her ears were deaf to the first croaks of the bullfrogs, her eyes blind to the first fireflies as they emerged from their resting places. As Saja cursed herself for missing the First Day, the First Dusk began.

The Divine Love of Eve

Harper Bolick

Mother of Sin

Ash Harbin

The chirps, howls, and hollering of the creatures of Eden filled the air as they flew over the trees and crawled through bushes and vines, creating a symphony of song that Lilith found pleasing to her ears. Her back was pressed against a date palm, eyes closed in a tranquil peace as she felt the warm touch of the sun's rays on her bronzed skin. Her hair, long and dark, flowed down her body like a river of night and shadow. A cool breeze blew through her hair, briefly causing the river of night to turn into a tsunami. Lilith was grateful that this area of Eden was unknown to Adam; it allowed her at least a moment of peace. For the garden of Eden, once a place of tranquility, had been warped into something different.

***

The first thing that Lilith ever saw was the glory of the Elder Angels as they finished turning dust into living beings. They were translucent entities that radiated a holy light, six pairs of swan wings covered in eyes, hovering above the earth and infused with the awesome power of Heaven. Their power and might were so great that Lilith was struck dumb, paralyzed by the divine representatives of creation and God. A moment passed, and the Angels were suddenly gone, having vanished faster than the blink of an eye. Free from the eldritch presence of the Elders, Lilith was able to focus on her surroundings. For the second time that day, Lilith found herself unable to speak.

She was surrounded by the greatest collection of flora and fauna known to the universe, a new genesis of life for the chosen world of God's people. The scenery was dominated by the color green, with a few occasional splashes of reds, blues, and violets as well as other colors that marked the primordial flowers of an

earthly paradise. Various types of trees, covered in bright green vines, dominated the landscape of Eden, acting as roosts for countless species of birds that filled the air with an orchestra of nature's music. Lilith eventually noticed a man standing a few feet to her right, with bronzed skin and dark hair like hers. The man also noticed her, and gawked at his companion, stunned by her beauty. Lilith walked closer to the man, who seemed to be in a daze. She eventually waved a hand in front of his face, which caused the man to snap out his trance, looking confused for a brief moment. After a few moments of silence, he regained his composure, taking a more confident stance. The man then pointed to himself and uttered the first word ever spoken by a human.

"Adam."

He then pointed at Lilith, and spoke his second word.

"Wife."

***

The warm and gentle touch of the rising sun woke Lilith from her slumber beneath the branches of a tree. As the birds of Eden began to fill the air with their song, Lilith stood up from her bed of moss, stretching her arms to the sky. She winced as she felt her leg muscles ache, the consequences of walking for hours straight through the garden of Eden. Adam had been compelled to give names to every animal and plant in Eden and had insisted that Lilith accompany him as he strolled through the garden.

"After all, the Angels made you my wife, so you have to do as I say," Adam had said as he puffed out his chest, attempting to appear as a confident and dominant figure. Even though Lilith did not want to travel around Eden, she obeyed nonetheless.

As Lilith continued to stretch her limbs, she heard Adam stop snoring and crawl out of bed, yawning as he grabbed a pear from a collection of assorted fruits that Lilith had gathered yesterday after Adam complained about his hunger. As Adam munched on his breakfast, Lilith began to feel dread at the prospect of yet

another day of following Adam around and indulging his every whim. After bending over to rub her sore calves, she decided that enough was enough. No more prancing through Eden so that Adam could name every creature he saw, and no more climbing trees to get fruit for her partner when he was hungry. After multiple days of following Adam, Lilith was going to have her day of rest.

Chewing on the last bite of his pear, Adam threw the stem into the bushes and stood up from his bed of moss. Adam yawned, stretched his arms and back, and motioned for Lilith to follow him as he began to walk through the trees of Eden. Lilith sat back down on her moss, leaned her back to the tree, and let Adam walk off by himself. A few moments later Adam noticed that the only pair of footsteps he could hear was his own. Confused, Adam turned around to see Lilith relaxing in the shade of a date palm.

"Come," said Adam, who motioned again to Lilith to follow him. Lilith continued to sit with her back to the tree. She then looked straight at Adam, and simply shook her head.

"Why not?" huffed Adam, who was beginning to look agitated.

"Tired," replied Lilith. "Legs hurt."

"Come," demanded Adam again, this time stamping his right foot to display his agitation. Lilith simply closed her eyes.

"Come!" shouted Adam, who was now furious over his partner's refusal to accompany him. Yet there was no response from her. Adam felt his irritation turn into anger, pure rage over having been denied something for the first time in his life. The furious first man, livid at his inability to command his wife, stalked over to Lilith, and gave one final demand.

"Come! Now!"

"No."

Determined to have the obedience he believed was divinely ordained, Adam raised his hand and slapped Lilith across the face, which caused her to fall over on her side. As she was flung on the

ground Lilith let out a yelp, shocked that Adam would hit her like this. Her cheek stinging from the blow, Lilith felt tears leaking from her eyes. Adam noticed that his hand had left a red mark on his wife's face. As Lilith propped herself on her elbows, Adam raised his hand as if he was going to slap her again, causing Lilith to flinch.

"Come," demanded Adam. This time, Lilith agreed, her face stinging as she followed Adam through the woods, fearful of further violence should she go against the will of her husband. Adam himself soon forgot about the violence he had inflicted, his mind now focusing on his quest through Eden.

***

Lilith sat with her back to a date palm, breeze blowing through her hair, enjoying the one refuge she had from the demands of Adam. His interest in exploring Eden had diminished over the course of a few days, leading to the first man spending his days napping and eating fruit harvested by his enslaved wife. Adam always napped while the sun was at its highest, allowing Lilith to slip away for a few moments of peace. Lilith would always go to a date palm she had discovered on her own, enjoying an Eden unspoiled by the impulsive Adam.

As she sat beneath the branches of the palm, Lilith began to hear a voice calling for her. She recognized it immediately; it was Adam, likely hungry after lounging on moss. Lilith let out an exasperated sigh, stood up from her place of rest, and walked back to where Adam was resting. As she stood in front of Adam, her husband demanded that she find him a pear. Lilith then left her husband to search for the wanted fruit, wandering amongst the trees as she rushed to obey. As she searched through countless flora, Lilith eventually noticed a strange tree she had never seen before. An overwhelming feeling of curiosity appeared within herself, driving Lilith to investigate this strange new plant.

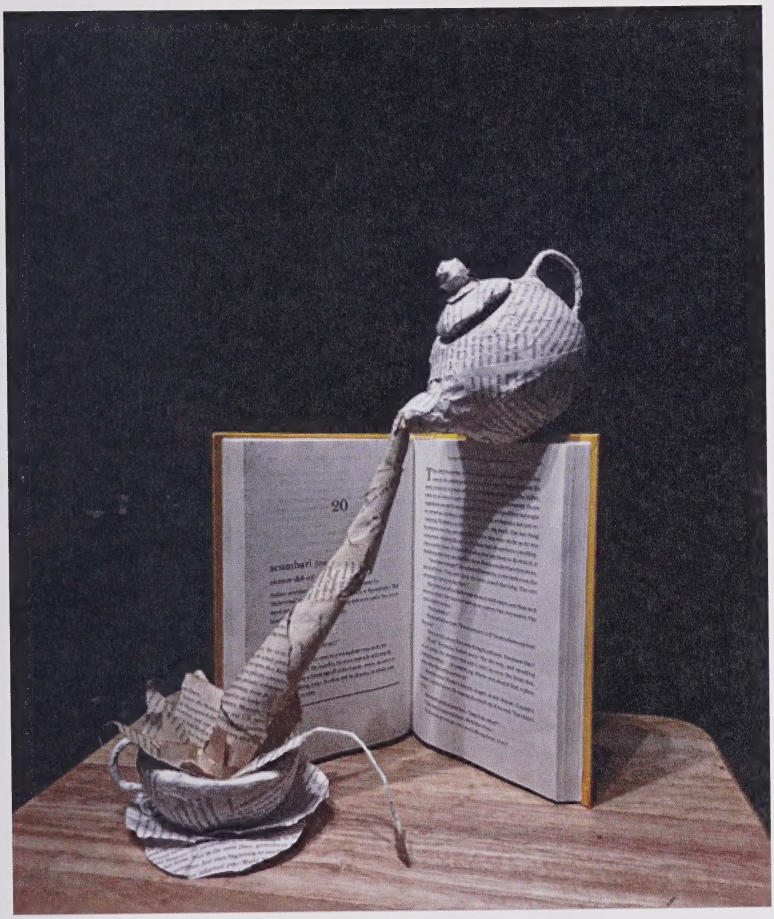
Compared to the other trees of Eden, which were vibrant and alive, this tree in question was gnarled and sickly, its twisted

branches and trunk covered in dark and decaying bark. The tree itself had no leaves, and only a single fruit which hung from a weakening branch that bowed under the weight of its growth. In contrast to the rest of the tree, the fruit was golden in color, gleaming with an entrancing beauty that seemed to call out to Lilith as she beheld it. As she continued to examine the tree, she also noticed a man sitting amongst its upper branches. Unlike Adam, this man had skin and hair pale as clouds. His eyes glowed with a golden light, which, along with the massive swan wings that emerged from his back, marked him as an unusual being. Lilith and the man both stared at each other for what seemed like an eternity. The stranger was the first to speak.

"They say the fruit of knowledge is the best treat," said the being with a grin. "And you do look ever so hungry."

Teatime

Kinley A. Gilliam



Wednesday

Laken M. Amick

My father gets paid on a Wednesday.
We rise early, dress in our best, pile in around the table,
Like mass for bastards.
I lick the grease from my lips and gorge myself on the last of his love.
He gets paid on a Wednesday.
One day the marrow will cease to flow, and I will find we scarcely knew each other at all.
It is Wednesday
I am so hungry.

In a Blink

Bronwen McCormick

spicata, nemorosa

Nilah Wharton

it tastes like June
one sunwarmed green on my
tongue and I am young again
hose water chlorine
dreaming red-clay handprints

a toy-car world, concrete kittens
walking black tar patches on the
neighbor-street cracks

I crush in my teeth
stains my lip with grass, imagination's
sundress kissed green and brown
where indoors had been

no more to mojitos, to
exam-day candies spiral-red and
sweet, to sedate old living

my mint is a little girl's summer.

Wabi Sabi

Dana Philips

Angel

Laura Dame

To my left: The turkey sheens, resting
in a pool of its own juices. To my right: The popsicle bleeds itself out of paralysis. In the distance: The last three pickles drift like jellyfish through their vinegar world. Before me: The half-full tub of yogurt, with a quarter-inch of whey sloshing around on top, wiggles itself towards my face. In my hand: A showy apple winks vulgarly at my face.

And there's so many spoons. Every time I blink—more spoons. They cover the table, sprout out of the floor—slither incestuously among the food. The recessed lights ricochet off the spoons like thousands of eyes. They blink when I blink. We blink. We blink. Blink. Blink.

The angel says grace. The angel eats.

I bite the apple. The flesh cracks with a cold reverb against my teeth. By the time I finish, my gums ache from the force of splitting apart the sweet meat.

The spoons rattle and clink against the dishes. I pick one up.

The whey splatters onto my arms as I stir the yogurt. My skin bulges into goosebumps. The pickles giggle at me like hyenas.

I chuck the spoon back into the cesspool and watch as it begins to evolve, growing tines to become a fork.

I try to pick up the popsicle but it falls off the stick, splatting onto the table like a wet sock. The turkey hands me a knife and I slice away at his back, carving out white meat that is overcooked.

I pick up a newborn fork and place the turkey into my mouth. Wizened muscle mass. My tongue can hardly take it, my glands can barely make enough saliva to get the meat down my gullet.

Montage. Inside the angel's stomach, the apple and the turkey reconstruct themselves into wholes. The angel flails her arms like she's drowning. The angel begins to cry. The apple and the turkey tell jokes until one offends the other and they start brawling. The angel gulps water. The angel is weeping.

I can barely set the glass down. Can barely get the chair away from the table. I can barely.

My stomach is quivering, possessed.

I falter down the hallway. My eyes are wide open and unseeing.

The bathroom. The toilet.

I can feel my throat reversing course. The turkey scrambling back up my esophagus. The apple screaming in rage after it.

They fall out of my mouth. Viscously blend with tears.

Flush. Flushed. My skin is cold, my body hot. I wash my face, wash my hands.

I will lie on this cool bathroom floor in the dark for the rest of my life.

The angel returns to the table. Knives are emerging from the Darwinian orgy of silverware. The popsicle is a stagnant puddle. The pickles are limp like dead fish at the bottom of the jar. Blades first, the knives march towards the angel.

Credits roll.

Moments Before Death

Harper Bolick

Frost Moon

Crain Cutler

With the Frost Moon came the first snow, which obscured her beauty.
But the tides of my body still felt her.
Pulling, as gravity will, the inside of me out.
Pushing, as any confidant will do, the cold reality of morning into the sleepy dream-state of
love.
Leaving me empty and shaking.
Wet and alone.
Bleeding in waves.

Imaginary Friend

Amanda L. Michael

Epilogue

Frank Henry

The last time I saw
his condescending eyes,
they had less of that
haughty thing such folks portray
and instead a helpless scramble
for the center of a maze,
which traveled and, dare I say,
did not allow
for an exit to be found
(an old story comes to mind).
And for once, the absence
of answers
screwed the bones
of his shriveled fingers into
his aging hands, which
were never supposed to get that way.

I've seen him dust
humble opinions from
the Vicuna jacket
he wore that day.
(what good does it do to don
Someone's mortgage in a coffee shop?)
But then he was chilled
between two lapels, whose
lining had been frayed.

(the last one like this I returned—no,
I kept his work and had it burned)

I ignored his plea and planned to run—
his eyes were black, as if from staring at the
perfect answer to life's only question.
The only one worth a damn—not
how many more grains of sand there are
when compared to the stars—but, well,
perhaps I should consider—
no, no, not now—
let's follow what folded his brow.

It was not the luminous smile
of a cream-sipping child
or a sleeping dog
who had just run for miles,
nor was it the eyes that glowed
in the cashier when customers showed—
what stole his sight
was exactly what might
concern a man of his
"invincible" status:

Torn paper dangled from the wall
it is my opinion he was only appalled
by the idea that maintenance had stalled
and ceased to exist solely to perfect
the few hollow days he had left.

(I only did what I thought had mattered
but death crawls near, my wealth soon shattered.

the mountains outside—why should they care
if there's nothing for me to do but stare
at that stupid marble fountain in my yard
or those damn leather chairs and shoes
that always fall apart?)

I won't remember him.

Whipping Boy

Max Smith

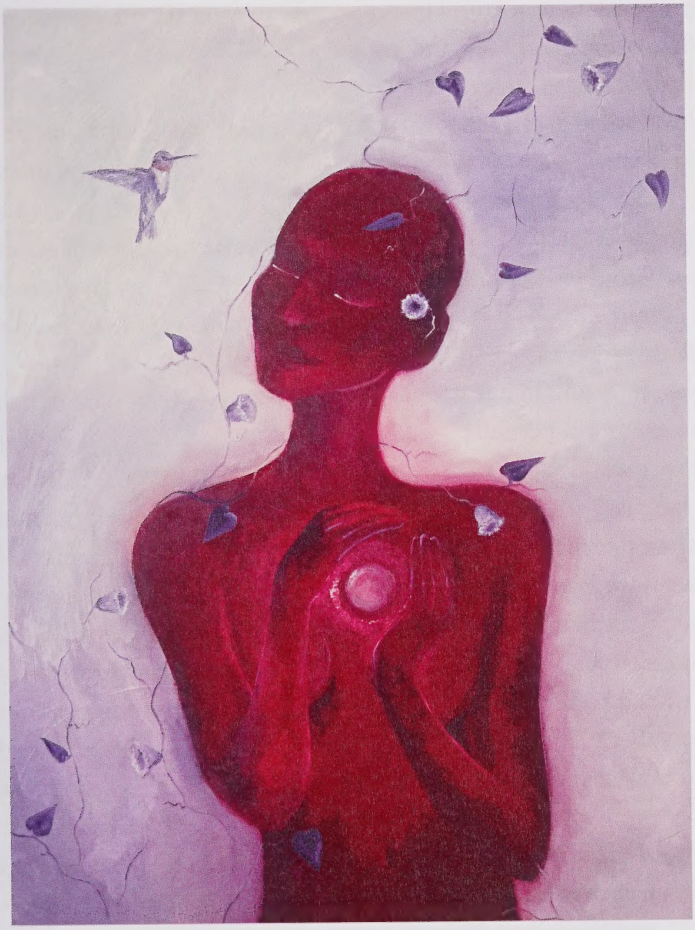
Ocean Lullaby

Sophia L. Brown

Let the sound of the waves lull you to sleep the same way I wish I could tonight.
The water scatters the light into shards as it moves, and the cloned remnants of light catch in your eyes as you smile, sparkling in a similar way to the moon on the ridges of those waves that are whispering so sweetly into your ear.
I told the ripples to give you a message and so the noise never stops, there is so much to voice and so much of it impossible to put into words.
I'm lucky the ocean doesn't get distracted by the bridge of your nose, I'm lucky the ocean doesn't feel hot when thinking about the sweat that runs down the back of your knees, I'm lucky the ocean doesn't close its eyes thinking about the way your lips move when you lean in to blow out the flame on a candle;
Maybe it'll have time to get the thoughts out before forgetting, something I can never quite do. The only thing the ocean and I have in common is drowning you, I'm just the only one who actually goes through with it.
Possession and rip currents are just two sides of the same coin.
As the tide touches you tomorrow just know I exchanged an embroilment with her, she knows to be gentle on you the same way my lips would be if I were there.
I don't think the ocean knows how to keep you warm—funny how I've always said I must do everything myself.
It's raining here tonight, and I told the ocean to emulate thunder for you. I don't know whether I should wish you to be awake to hear the imitated syllables of crashes or if I should wish you asleep.

New Beginning

Lyle Skelton



Ebb & Flow

Emma V. Owen

We used to walk upstream
Through tunnels of laurel leaves
Bark caught in our hair, and broken glass
Cut our shoeless feet.
We captained green schooners with
Twig masts
And raced to see whose the current
Tipped over last.
"Tame Frog" we called that frog
We caught
Because it stayed
So fearfully still in our hands.
We executed paperdolls
In those waterfalls
We laughed
As their penciled bodies turned to pulp.
Cakes—we made cakes of sand!
Quartz candies, mud frosting
How delicious!
We waded and splashed all day, sister.
Remember?
The creek has washed our childhood away.

We used to build dams
Piled up shovel-loads of sand
Sticks and muck, handfuls of sludge
We couldn't dig deep enough.

We found
A Neverland of lost things
Plastic soldiers, missing
Legs and arms.
Shards of pottery—some larger than our hands
We broke
Icicles off the frozen rocks
Sharp as spears! Or fangs
That summer melted
Into snakes:
Sir Swims-a-lot, Lady Longtail
Decked all in
Their scaley livery
We named an island after you, sister
Remember?
The creek cannot wash away our memories.

When did our gold become mica?
Our flour
Just sand?
When did the spring
Of my imagination
Dry up?
Are half-drowned toys
And strangely-shaped stones
Happier on my windowsill shelf?
When did time start flowing
Faster than those flash-flood waters, sister?
Remember?
We are made of all the things
The creek has washed away.

Ectoplasm

Amanda L. Michael

Contributors

Channa Alterman is an Asheville native artist working and teaching out of the local studio Odyssey ClayWorks while also working as a full-time student to complete her AFA and BA with a concentration in ceramic arts.

Laken M. Amick is an up-and-coming queer writer, born in the Carolinas and raised across Appalachia. Their infatuation is with the grotesque, awe-inspiring, and mysterious. Laken can be found inching toward their English degree when they're not hunting vampires, inciting ancient curses, or resurrecting the old gods.

Harper Bolick is a full-time student in the Associate of Fine Arts program. They primarily work in 2-D mediums and favor painting.

Sophia Brown is a full-time student at A-B Tech pursuing an AA Degree, as well as a degree in Culinary arts. She is local to WNC and enjoys hiking, photography, art, and reading.

Julius Coggins is a full-time student studying fine art with a focus on illustration and character design.

Crain Cutler is a working artist, stylist, interior designer, writer, small business owner, and community organizer. Their work is largely influenced by the Bauhaus schools and abstract expressionists like Lee Krasner and Mark Rothko.

Laura Dame holds a bachelor's degree in English from Furman University. Before that, she was an A-B Tech student. Currently, she lives in South Carolina where she works and writes poetry.

Caitlin Donovan is a novelist, teacher, poet and, above all, a huge geek for all kinds of fiction. Caitlin is an administrative assistant at the A-B Tech Writing Center and a Writing Professor at Southern New Hampshire University. She published her novel *In the Way of All Flesh* with Flashpoint Publications.

Olivia Gamache is a full-time student at A-B Tech. In her second and final year, she plans to transfer to a four-year university within the next year to study English. She enjoys writing poetry and short fiction during her free time.

Kinley A. Gilliam is in her second semester at A-B Tech working towards her Associates of Arts degree.

Diana Laura Guzman is a full-time student who enjoys drawing in her free time.

Ash Harbin has always loved sci-fi, fantasy, and biblical mythology, which has inspired them to write their own stories. Ash lives in WNC with two cats.

Frank Henry is currently a student at UNC Chapel Hill, where he is studying applied mathematics. He hopes to self-publish his debut novel later this year.

Jeff Horner is a very silly name for an adult.

Kaydon Ruth Ingle is a first-year nursing student pursuing the recent discovery of her love of poetry and expression through it.

Clay Jones is an employee at the A-B Tech bookstore and enjoyer of art in all its forms.

Liv Lemire is a Writing Tutor who grew up believing she hated writing. It turns out she hated homework and being told what to do. Originally from Western Massachusetts, she now lives in Asheville, NC. A note for readers: the "bitchy" coworkers described are not the Writing Center Staff.

Michelle Nicole Letts is a multidisciplinary artist pursuing an AFA. She comes from a family of gifted artists and is happily maneuvering through studio classes, enjoying every medium she comes across.

Heather J. Lewis is an adjunct faculty member in the Art Department at A-B Tech. Born in the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, Heather arrived in Asheville in 2007. She makes art that reflects her life and understanding of the world she lives in.

Dillon MacEwen is an artist and woodworking student who occasionally crawls out from under rocks to submit art and poetry to fine publications.

Joe McCarty has been a Writing Center Tutor at A-B Tech for nearly three years. He is from West Jefferson, NC and loves poetry, nonfiction, and film!

Bronwen McCormick works in the culinary department as an instructor and lab manager. She spends her spare time in the amazing WNC outdoors and attempts to do them justice in watercolor.

Amanda L. Michael is a full-time student who can't make up her mind about which medium is her favorite.

Ronnie Z. Nielsen is a concept artist, illustrator, and graphic novelist in progress. They love engaging in all kinds of artistic expression, including (but not limited to) music making & songwriting, theatre & performance arts, and the art of making sure every cat they meet loves them the most.

Emma V. Owen is an artist, musician, and writer. She hopes to pursue a career in at least one of those things.

Morgan M. P. is a full time student at BCEC who turned art into their own personal hidey hole.

Dana Phillips is an artist whose primary focus is watercolor, collage, and acrylic painting. Her work is whimsical and unique with an emphasis on nature and its beauty and imperfections.

Mark Damon Puckett, MA, MLitt, MLitt, MFA, is an Asheville artist, musician and writer. His new literary crime novel, *The Nihilistics*, will be published in January 2025. Visit markdamonpuckett.com for more info.

Jennifer C. Quayle is a full time student at A-B Tech, on track to transfer to Florida State College Jacksonville to complete a degree in Mortuary Science. A lifelong writer, she is currently working on her debut novel with the hopes of publication.

Lyle Skelton is a full-time student working towards his A.A.S in CAD Technology. He began drawing and creating before he could speak as a way to communicate with the world around him. Personal experiences and unvoiced feelings shape his paintings and poetry.

Max Smith is a mixed-media artist exploring themes of trauma, resilience, social inequality, and accessible art. Max's artistic goal is to help people feel seen and know that they matter and to highlight the injustices that lead so many to feeling isolated, unloved, and unlovable. He resides in Asheville with his amazing partner, amazing daughter, and two amazingly needy cats.

Stella Rising Waymouth is a robotics nerd, violinist, and high school student who has been writing in her free time since elementary school. She enjoys a wide range of fiction, especially if it includes dragons.

Kennon Webber holds both B.A. and M.A. degrees in History. He's a Navy Vet (Vietnam Era) and former Merchant Mariner. For 20+ years he lived in San Francisco, working various gigs while participating in open mic poetry gatherings

throughout the Bay Area. In 2020, he moved to Asheville and began working at the A-B Tech Bookstore a few years later.

Taylor E. Wells is a 20-year-old student at A-B Tech studying to get her Associates in Fine Arts. She has been making art almost her entire life and decided the only career she would persue would be in the art field. She is transferring to UNCA to study Fine Arts and Education to be an art teacher.

Nilah Wharton is sometimes a writer and always a daydreamer, and likes to spend their free time putting words in new and interesting orders. They are a pre-sonography student, but working on an associate's in art while they try to get into the program.

Erin Marie Nelson Wheeler is an accountant in the Business Office who recently started writing Haikus as a way of relaxing and being present in the moment.

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